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AGE OF REASON.

PART THE SECOND.



THE
AGE OF REASON.

PART THE SECOND.

B E I N G A N

I N V E S T I G A T I O N

O F

TRUE AND OF FABULOUS

T H E O L O G Y.

B Y T H O M A S P A I N E,

Author of the works entitled Common Sense,—Rights of Man, part first
and second,—the first part of the Age of Reason,—and Dissertations on
First Principles of Government.

PRINTED FOR THE BOOKSELLERS.

MDCXC VII.

and I had not finished it more than six hours, in the state it has since appeared, before a guard came, about three in the morning, with an order signed by the two committees of public safety and surety general for putting me in arrestation as a foreigner, and conveying me to the prison of the Luxembourg. I contrived, in my way there, to call on Joel Barlow, and I put the manuscript of the work into his hands, as more safe than in my possession in prison: and not knowing what might be the fate in France, either of the writer or the work, I addressed it to the protection of the citizens of the United States.

It is justice that I say, that the guard who executed this order, and the interpreter to the committee of general surety, who accompanied them to examine my papers, treated me not only with civility, but with respect. The keeper of the Luxembourg, Benoit, a man of a good heart, shewed to me every friendship in his power, as did also all his family, while he continued in that station. He was removed from it, put into arrestation, and carried before the tribunal upon a malignant accusation, but acquitted.

After I had been in the Luxembourg about three weeks, the Americans, then in Paris, went in a body to the convention, to reclaim me as their countryman and friend; but were answered by the president, Vadier, who was also president of the committee of surety general, and had signed the order for my arrestation, that I was born in England. I heard no more after this from any person out of the walls of the prison, till the fall of Robespierre on the 9th of Thermidor, 27th July, 1794.

About two months before this event, I was seized with a fever that in its progress had every symptom of becoming mortal, and from the effects of which I am not recovered. It was then that I remembered with renewed satisfaction, and congratulated myself most sincerely, on having written the former part of the AGE of REASON. I had then but little expectation of surviving, and those about me had less. I know therefore, by experience, the conscientious trial of my own principles.

I was then with three chamber comrades, Joseph Vanhuele of Bruges, Charles Bastini and Michael Robyns of Louvain. The unceasing and anxious attention of these three friends to me by night and day, I remember with gratitude, and mention with pleasure. It happened that a physician (Dr. Graham) and a surgeon (Mr. Bond) part of the suite of General O'Hara, were then in the Luxembourg. I ask not myself whether it be convenient to them, as men under the English government, that I ex-

press to them my thanks, but I should reproach myself if I did not, and also to the physician of the Luxembourg, Dr. Markoski.

I have some reason to believe, because I cannot discover any other, that this illness preserved me in existence. Among the papers of Robespierre that were examined and reported upon to the convention by a committee of deputies, is a note in the handwriting of Robespierre in the following words:

“ Demander que Thomas Paine	“ Demand that Thomas Paine
“ soit decrete d'accusation pour l'in-	“ be decreed of accusation, for
“ teret de l'Amerique autant que de	“ the interest of America as well
“ la France.”	“ as of France.”

From what cause it was that the intention was not put in execution, I know not, and cannot inform myself; and therefore I ascribe it to impossibility on account of that illness.

The Convention, to repair as much as lay in their power the injustice I had sustained, invited me publicly and unanimously to return into the Convention, and which I accepted, to shew I could bear an injury without permitting it to injure my principles or my disposition. It is not because right principles have been violated that they are to be abandoned.

I have seen, since I have been at liberty, several publications written, some in America and some in England, as answers to the former part of the Age of Reason. If the authors of these can amuse themselves by so doing, I shall not interrupt them. They may write against the work and against me as much as they please. They do me more service than they intend, and I can have no objection that they write on. They will find, however, by this second part, without its being written as an answer to them, that they must return to their work, and spin their cobweb over again. The first is brushed away by accident.

They will now find that I have furnished myself with a bible and testament; and I can say also that I have found them to be much worse books than I had conceived. If I have erred in any thing in the former part of the Age of Reason, it has been by speaking better of some parts than they deserved.

I observe that all my opponents resort, more or less, to what they call scripture evidence and bible authority to help them out. They are so little masters of the subject as to confound a dispute about authenticity, with a dispute about doctrines. I will, however, put them right, that if they should be disposed to write any more, they may know how to begin.

October 1795.

THOMAS PAINE.

Books of *testimony*, and they testify of things naturally incredible; and therefore the whole of our belief, as to the authenticity of those books, rests in the first place, upon the *certainty* that they were written by Moses, Joshua and Samuel; secondly, upon the credit we give to their testimony. We may believe the first, that is, we may believe the certainty of the authorship, and yet not the testimony; in the same manner, that we may believe that a certain person gave evidence upon a case and yet not believe the evidence that he gave. But if it should be found that the books ascribed to Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, were not written by Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, every part of the authority and authenticity of those books is gone at once, for there can be no such thing as forged or invented testimony, neither can there be anonymous testimony, more especially as to things naturally incredible, such as that of talking with God face to face, or that of the sun and moon standing still at the command of a man.

The greatest part of the other ancient books are works of genius; of which kind are those ascribed to Homer, to Plato, to Aristotle, to Demosthenes, to Cicero, &c. Here again the author is not an essential in the credit we give to any of those works; for as works of genius they would have the same merit they have now were they anonymous. Nobody believes the Trojan story, as related by Homer, to be true; for it is the poet only that is admired, and the merit of the poet will remain though the story be fabulous. But if we disbelieve the matters related by the bible authors, Moses for instance, as we disbelieve the things related by Homer, there remains nothing of Moses in our estimation but an impostor. As to the ancient historians, from Herodotus to Tacitus, we credit them as far as they relate things probable and credible, and no further; for if we do, we must believe the two miracles which Tacitus relates were performed by Vespasian, that of curing the lame man and a blind man in just the same manner as the same things are told of Jesus Christ by his historians. We must also believe the miracle cited by Josephus; that of the sea of Pàmphilia opening to let Alexander and his army pass, as is related of the red sea in Exodus. These miracles are quite as well authenticated as

the bible miracles, and yet we do not believe them.—Consequently the degree of evidence necessary to establish our belief of things naturally incredible, whether in the bible or elsewhere, is far greater than that which obtains on belief to natural and probable things and therefore the advocates for the bible have no claim to our belief of the bible, because that we believe the things stated in other ancient writings : since that we believe the things stated in those writings no further than they are probable and credible, or because they are self-evident like Euclid, or admire them because they are elegant like Homer, or approve them because they are sedate like Plato, or judicious like Aristotle.

Having premised those things, I proceed to examine the authenticity of the bible, and I begin with what are called the five books of Moses ; *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*. My intention is to shew, that those books are spurious, and that Moses is not the author of them ; and still further, that they were not written in the time of Moses, nor till several hundred years afterwards, that they are no other than an attempted history of the life of Moses, and of the times in which he is said to have lived ; and also of the times prior thereto, written by some very ignorant and stupid pretenders to authorship several hundred years after the death of Moses ; as men now write histories of things that happened, or are supposed to have happened, several hundred or several thousand years ago.

The evidence that I shall produce in this case, is from the books themselves ; and I will confine myself to this evidence only. Were I to refer for proofs to any of the ancient authors, whom the advocates of the bible call prophane authors, they would controvert that authority as I controvert theirs. I will therefore come on their own ground, and oppose them with their own weapon, the bible.

In the first place, there is no affirmative evidence that Moses is the author of those books ; and that he is the author, is altogether an unfounded opinion got abroad nobody knows how. The style and manner in which those books are written, give no room to believe, or even to
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suppose, they were written by Moses; for it is altogether the style and manner of another person speaking of Moses. In Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers (for every thing in Genesis is prior to the time of Moses, and not the least allusion is made to him therein) the whole I say, of these books is in the third person: it is always, *the Lord said unto Moses, or Moses said unto the Lord, or Moses said unto the People, or the People said unto Moses*; and this is the style and manner that historians use in speaking of the persons whose lives and actions they are writing. It may be said that a man may speak of himself in the third person, and therefore it may be supposed that Moses did; but supposition proves nothing; and if the advocates for the belief that Moses wrote those books himself, have nothing better to advance than supposition, they may as well be silent.

But granting the grammatical right that Moses might speak of himself in the third person, because any man might speak of himself in that manner, it cannot be admitted as a fact in those books, that it is Moses who speaks, without rendering Moses truly ridiculous and absurd.—For example, Numb. Chap. xii. v. 3. “*Now the man Moses was VERY MEEK above all the men which were on the face of the earth.*” If Moses said this of himself, instead of being the meekest of men, he was one of the most vain and arrogant of coxcombs; and the advocates for those books may now take which side they please, for both sides are against them. If Moses was not the author, the books are without authority; and if he was the author, the author is without credit; because to boast of *meekness* is the reverse of meekness, and is a *lie in sentiment*.

In Deuteronomy the style and manner of writing marks more evidently than in former books that Moses is not the writer. The manner here used is dramatical. The writer opens the subject by a short introductory discourse, and then introduces Moses as in the act of speaking, and when he has made Moses finish his harangue, he (the writer) resumes his own part and speaks till he brings Moses forward again, and at last closes the scene with an account of the death, funeral, and character of Moses.

This interchange of speakers occurs four times in this book.

book. From the first verse of the first chapter to the end of the fifth verse of it is the writer who speaks, he then introduces Moses as in the act of making his harrangue, and this continues to the end of the 40th verse of the fourth chapter. Here the writer drops Moses and speaks historically of what was done in consequence of what Moses, when living is supposed to have said, and which the writer had dramatically rehearsed.

The writer opens the subject again in the first verse of the fifth chapter, though it is only by saying that Moses called the people of Israel together; he then introduces Moses as before, and continues him as in the act of speaking to the end of the 26th chapter. He doth the same thing at the beginning of the 27th chapter, and continues Moses, as in the act of speaking, to the end of the 28th chapter. At the 29th chapter the writer speaks again through the whole of the first verse, and the first line of the second verse, where he introduces Moses for the last time, and continues him as in the act of speaking to the end of the 33d chapter.

The writer having now finished the rehearsal on the part of Moses, comes forward and speaks through the whole of the last chapter. He begins by telling the reader that Moses went up to the top of Pisgah, and he saw from thence the land which (the writer says) had been promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—that he, Moses died there in the land of Moab—that *he* buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, but that no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day; that is, unto the time in which the writer lived who wrote the book of Deuteronomy. The writer then tells, that Moses was one hundred and ten years of age when he died—that his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated; and he concludes by saying, that there arose not a prophet *since* in Israel like unto Moses, whom says this anonymous writer, the Lord knew face to face.

Having thus shewn, as far as grammatical evidence applies, that Moses was not the writer of those books, I will after making a few observations on the inconsistencies of the writer of the book of Deuteronomy, proceed to shew, from the original and chronological evidence contained

in those books, that Moses *was not* because *he could not be*, the writer of them ; and consequently, that there is no authority for believing, that the inhuman and horrid buche-ries of men, women, and children, told of in those books, were done, as those books say they were, at the command of God. It is a duty incumbent on every true deist, that he vindicates the moral justice of God against the calumnies of the bible.

The writer of the book of Deuteronomy, whoever he was, for it is an anonymous work, is obscure and also contradictory with himself in the account he has given of Moses.

After telling that Moses went to the top of Pisgah, (and it does not appear from any accounts that he ever came down again) he tells us that Moses died *there* in the land of Moab, and that *he* buried him in a valley in the land of Moab : but as there is no antecedent to the pronoun *he*, there is no knowing who the *he* was that did bury him. If the writer meant that *he* (God) buried him, how should *he* the writer, know it, or why should we (the readers) believe him, since we know not who the writer was that tells us so ; for certainly Moses could not himself tell where he was buried.

The writer also tells us, that no man knoweth where the sepulchre of Moses is *unto this day*, meaning the time in which this writer lived, how then should he know that Moses was buried in a valley in the land of Moab ? for as the writer lived long after the time of Moses, as is evident from his using the expression *unto this day*, meaning a great length of time after the death of Moses, he certainly was not at his funeral. And on the other hand it is impossible that Moses himself could say, that no *man knoweth where his sepulchre is unto this day*. To make Moses the speaker would be an improvement on the play of a child that hides itself and cries, *nobody can find me*. Nobody can find Moses.

This writer has nowhere told us how he came by the speeches that he has put into the mouth of Moses to speak, and therefore we have a right to conclude that he either composed them himself or wrote them from oral tradition. One or other of these is the more probable, since he has
given,

given, in the fifth chapter, a table of commandments, in which that called the fourth commandment is different from the fourth commandment in the twentieth chapter of Exodus. In that of Exodus, the reason given for keeping the seventh day is, because (says the commandment) God made the heavens and the earth in six days, and rested on the seventh; but in that of Deuteronomy, the reason given is, that it was the day on which the children of Israel came out of Egypt, and *therefore*, says this commandment, *the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath-day.* This makes no mention of the creation, nor *that* of the coming out of Egypt. There are also many things given as laws of Moses in this book, that are not to be found in any of the other books, among which is that inhuman and brutal law, ch. xxi. v. 18, 19, 20, 21, which authorises parents, the father, and the mother, to bring their own children to have them stoned to death, for what it is pleased to call stubbornness. But priests have always been fond of preaching up Deuteronomy, for Deuteronomy preaches up tythes; and it is from this book, ch. xxv. v. 4, they have taken the phrase, and applied it to tything, that *thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.* And that this might not escape observation, they have noted it in the table of contents, at the head of the chapter, though it is only a single verse of less than two lines. O priests! priests! ye are willing to be compared to an ox for the sake of tythes. Though it is impossible for us to know *identically* who the writer of Deuteronomy was, it is not difficult to discover him *professionally*, that he was some Jewish priest, who lived, as I shall shew in the course of this work, at least three hundred and fifty years after the time of Moses.

I come now to speak of the historical and chronological evidence. The chronology that I shall use is the bible chronology, for I mean not to go out of the bible for evidence of any thing, but to make the bible itself prove, historically and chronologically, that Moses is not the author of the books ascribed to him. It is therefore proper that I inform the reader (such at least as may not have the opportunity of knowing it) that in the larger bibles, and also in some smaller ones, there is a series of chronology printed in the margin of every page, for the purpose of shewing

shewing how long the historical matters stated in each page happened, or are supposed to have happened, before Christ, and consequently the distance of time between one historical circumstance and another.

I begin with the book of Genesis.—In the 14th chapter of Genesis, the writer gives an account of Lot being taken prisoner, in a battle between the four kings against five, and carried off; and that when the account of Lot being taken came to Abraham, that he armed all his household, and marched to rescue Lot from the captors; and that he pursued them unto *Dan*. (v. 14.)

To shew in what manner this expression of pursuing *them unto Dan*, applies to the case in question, I will refer to two circumstances, the one in America, the other in France. The city now called New-York in America, was originally New-Amsterdam; and the town in France lately called Havre-Marat, was before called Havre-de-Grace. New-Amsterdam was changed to New-York, in the year 1664, and Havre-de-Grace to Havre-Marat, in the year 1793. Should, therefore, any writing be found, though without date, in which the name of *New-York* should be mentioned, it would be certain evidence that such a writing could not have been written before, and must have been written after New-Amsterdam was changed to New-York, and consequently not till after the year 1664, or at least during the course of that year. And in like manner any dateless writing, with the name of Havre-Marat would be certain evidence that such a writing must have been written after Havre-de-Grace became Havre-Marat, and consequently not till after the year 1793, or at least during the course of that year.

I now come to the application of those cases, and to shew that there was no such place as *Dan* till many years after the death of Moses, and consequently that Moses could not be the writer of the book of Genesis where this account of pursuing them unto *Dan* is given.

The place that is called Dan in the bible, was originally a town of the Gentiles called Laish, and when the tribe of Dan seized upon this town, they changed its name to Dan, in commemoration of Dan, who was the father of that tribe, and the great grandson of Abraham.

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To establish this proof, it is necessary to refer from Genesis to the 18th chapter of the book, called the Book of Judges. It is there said, (verse 27) that *they* (the Danites) *came unto Laish to a people that were quiet and secure, and they smote them with the edge of the sword* (the bible is filled with murder) *and burned the city with fire—and they built a city* (verse 28) *and dwelt therein—and they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, howbeit the name of the city was Laish at the first.*

This account of the Danites taking possession of Laish and changing it to Dan, is placed in the book of Judges immediately after the death of Sampson. The death of Sampson is said to have happened 1120 years before Christ, and that of Moses 1451 before Christ; and therefore according to the historical arrangement, the place was not called Dan till 331 years after the death of Moses.

There is a striking confusion between the historical and the chronological arrangement in the book of Judges. The five last chapters, as they stand in the book 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, are put chronologically before all the preceding chapters. They are made to be 28 years before the 16th chapter, 266 before the 15th—245 before the 13th—195 before the 9th—90 before the 4th—and 15 years before the first chapter. This shews the uncertain and fabulous state of the bible. According to the chronological arrangement, the taking of Laish and giving it the name of Dan, is made be twenty years after the death of Joshua, who was the successor of Moses; and by the historical order, as it stands in the book, it is made to be three hundred and six years after the death of Joshua, and three hundred and thirty-one after that of Moses. But they both exclude Moses from being the writer of Genesis; because, according to either of the statements, no such place as Dan existed in the time of Moses; and therefore the writer of Genesis must have been some person that lived after the town of Laish had the name of Dan, and who that person was nobody knows, and consequently the book of Genesis is anonymous and without authority.

I come now to state another point of historical and chronological evidence, and to shew therefrom, as in the preceeding case, that Moses is not the author of the book of Genesis.

In the 36th chapter of Genesis, there is given a genealogy of the sons and descendants of Esau, who are called Edomites, and also a list by name of the Kings of Edom; in enumerating of which, it is said, verse 30. "and these
"are the kings that reigned in Edom *before there reigned any king over the children of Israel.*"

Now, were any dateless writing to be found, in which, speaking of any past events, the writer should say, these things happened before there was any congress in America, or before there was any convention in France, it would be evidence that such writing could not have been written before, and could only be written after, there was a congress in America, or a convention in France, as the case might be; and consequently that it could not be written by any person who died before there was a congress in the one country, or a convention in the other.

Nothing is more frequent, as well in history as in conversation, than to refer to a fact in the room of a date. It is most natural so to do, first, because a fact fixes itself in the memory better than a date; secondly, because the fact includes the date, and serves to give two ideas at once; and this manner of speaking by circumstances, implies as positively that the fact alluded to *is past*, as if it was so expressed. When a person, in speaking upon any matter, says it was before I was married—or before my son was born—or before I went to America—or before I went to France, it is absolutely understood, and intended to be understood, that he has been married—that he has had a son—that he has been in America, or been in France. Language does not admit of using this mode of expression in any other sense; and whenever such an expression is found any where, it can only be understood in the sense in which only it could have been used.

The passage, therefore, that I have quoted—"that these
"are the kings that reigned in Edom before there reigned
"*any king over the children of Israel,*" could only have been written after the first king began to reign over them; and consequently that the book of Genesis, so far from having been written by Moses, could not have been written till the time of Saul at least. This is the positive sense of the passage, but the expression *any king*, implies more
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kings than one, at least implies two ; and this will carry it to the time of David, and if taken in a general sense, it carries itself through all times of the Jewish monarchy.

Had we met with this verse in any part of the bible that *professed* to have been written after kings began to reign in Israel, it would have been impossible not to have seen the application of it. It happens then that this is the case. The two books of Chronicles, which give a history of *all* the kings of Israel; are *professedly*, as well as in fact, written after the Jewish monarchy begun, and this verse that I have quoted, and all the remaining verses of the 36th chapter of Genesis are, word for word, in the first chapter of Chronicles beginning at the 43d verse.

It was with consistency that the writer of the Chronicles could say, as he has said, 1 Chron. ch. i. ver. 43, *These are the kings that reigned in Edom before there reigned any king over the children of Israel*; because he was going to give, and has given, a list of the kings that had reigned in Israel. But as it is impossible that the same expression could have been used before that period, it is as certain as any thing can be proved from historical language, that this part of Genesis is taken from Chronicles, and that Genesis is not so old as Chronicles; and probably not so old as the book of Homer or as Æsop's fables; admitting Homer to have been, as the tables of chronology state cotemporary with David or Solomon, and Æsop to have lived about the end of the Jewish monarchy.

Take away from Genesis the belief that Moses was the author, on which only the strange belief that it is the word of God has stood, and there remains nothing of Genesis but an anonymous book of stories, fables, and traditionary or invented absurdities, or of down-right lies. The story of Eve and the serpent, and of Noah and his ark, drops to a level with the Arabian tales, without the merit of being entertaining; and the account of men living to eight and nine hundred years, becomes as fabulous as the immortality of the giants of the mythology.

Besides, the character of Moses, as stated in the bible, is the most horrid that can be imagined. If those accounts be true, he was the wretch that first began and carried on wars on the score, or on the pretence, of religion; and

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under that mask, or that infatuation, committed the most unexampled atrocities that are to be found in the history of any nation, of which I will only state one instance.

When the Jewish army returned from one of their plundering and murdering excursions, the account goes on as follows, Numbers, chap. xxxi, ver. 13.

“ And Moses and Eleazer the priest, and all the princes of the congregation, went forth to meet them without the camp.—And Moses was *wroth* with the officers of the host, with the captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, which came from the battle.—And Moses said unto them, *Have ye saved all the women alive?*—Behold these caused the children of Israel through the council of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord.—Now, therefore, *kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known a man by lying with him.—But all the women-children that hath not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves.*”

Among the detestable villains that in any period of the world have disgraced the name of man, it is impossible to find a greater than Moses if this account be true. Here is an order to butcher the boys, to massacre the mothers, and debauch the daughters.

Let any mother put herself in the situation of those mothers,—one child murdered—another destined to violation, and herself in the hands of an executioner; let any daughter put herself in the situation of those daughters, destined as prey to the murderers of a mother and a brother, and what will be their feelings? It is in vain that we attempt to impose upon nature, for nature will have her course, and the religion that tortures all her social ties is a false religion.

After this detestable order, follows an account of the plunder taken, and the manner of dividing it; and here it is that the prophaneness of priestly hypocrisy encreases the catalogue of crimes—verse 37,—And the Lord's tribute of the sheep was six hundred and threescore and fifteen;—and the beeves were thirty and six thousand, of which the Lord's tribute was threescore and twelve—
and

“ and the asses were thirty thousand, of which *the Lord's* tribute was threescore and one—and the persons were sixteen thousand, of which *the Lord's* tribute was thirty and two.” In short, the matters contained in this chapter, as well as in many other parts of the bible, are too horrid for humanity to read, or for decency to hear ; for it appears from the 35th verse of this chapter, that the number of women-children consigned to debauchery by the order of Moses was thirty-two thousand.

People in general know not what wickedness there is in this pretended word of God. Brought up in habits of superstition, they take it for granted, that the bible is true, and that it is good. They permit themselves not to doubt of it ; and they carry the ideas they form of the benevolence of the Almighty to the book which they have been taught to believe was written by his authority. Good heavens, it is quite another thing ! It is a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy ; for what can be greater blasphemy than to ascribe the wickedness of man to the orders of the Almighty.

But to return to my subject, that of shewing that Moses is not the author of the books ascribed to him, and that the bible is spurious.—The two instances I have already given would be sufficient, without any additional evidence to invalidate the authenticity of any book that pretended to be four or five hundred years more ancient than the matters it speaks of, or refers to, as facts ; for in the case of *pursuing them unto Dan*, and of the *kings that reigned over the children of Israel*, not even the flimsy pretence of prophecy can be pleaded. The expressions are in the preter-tense, and it would be down right idiotism to say, that a man could prophesy in the preter-tense.

But there are many other passages scattered throughout those books that unite in the same point of evidence. It is said in Exodus (another of the books ascribed to Moses) chap. xvi, v. 34. “ And the children of Israel did eat manna until they came to a land inhabited ; they did eat manna until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan.”

Whether the children of Israel eat manna or not, or what manna was, or whether it was any thing more than
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a kind of fungus, or small mushroom, or other vegetable substance common to that part of the country, makes no part of my argument. All that I mean to shew is, that it is not Moses that could write this account, because the account extends itself beyond the life time of Moses. Moses, according to the bible, (but it is such a book of lies and contradictions, there is no knowing which part to believe or whether any) died in the wilderness, and never came upon the borders of the land of Canaan, and consequently it could not be he that said what the children of Israel did or what they eat when they came there. This account of eating manna, which they tell us was written by Moses, extends itself to the time of Joshua, the successor of Moses as appears by the account given in the book of Joshua after the children of Israel had passed the river Jordan and came into the borders of the land of Canaan. Joshua, chap. v, ver. 12. "*And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more, but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.*"

But a more remarkable instance than this occurs in Deuteronomy, which, while it shews that Moses could not be the writer of that book, shews also the fabulous notions that prevailed at that time about giants. In the third chapter of Deuteronomy, among the conquests said to be made by Moses, is an account of the taking of Og, king of Basan, verse 12. "For only Og, king of Basan, remained of the race of giants. Behold his bedstead was a bedstead of iron; is it not in Rabbath of the children of Ammon? Nine cubits was the length thereof, and four cubits the breadth of it after the cubit of a man." A cubit is 1 foot 9 $\frac{888}{1000}$ inches. The length, therefore, of the bed was 16 feet 4 inches, and the breadth 7 feet 4 inches. Thus much for this giant's bed. Now for the historical part, which though the evidence is not so direct and positive as in the former cases; it is, nevertheless, very presumable and corroborating evidence, and is better than the *best* evidence on the contrary side.

The writer, by way of proving the existence of this giant, refers to his bed, as to an *ancient relic*, and says, is it not in Rabbath (or Rabbah) of the children of Ammon? meaning

meaning, that it is ; for such is frequently the bible method of affirming a thing. But it could not be Moses that said this, because Moses could know nothing about Rabbah nor of what was in it. Rabbah was not a city belonging to this giant king, nor was it one of the cities that Moses took. The knowledge, therefore, that this bed was at Rabbah, and of the particulars of its dimensions must be referred to the time when Rabbah was taken, and this was not till four hundred years after the death of Moses ; for which see 2 Sam. ch. xii, ver. 26. “ And Joab (David’s “ General) fought against *Rabbah of the children of Ammon*, “ and took the royal city, &c.”

As I have not undertaken to point out all the contradictions in time, place and circumstance, that abound in the books ascribed to Moses, and which prove to demonstration, that those books could not be written by Moses, nor in the time of Moses, I proceed to the book of Joshua ; and to shew that Joshua is not the author of that book, and that it is anonymous and without authority. The evidence I shall produce is contained in the book itself, I will not go out of the bible for proof against the supposed authenticity of the bible. False testimony is always good against itself.

Joshua, according to the first chapter of Joshua, was the immediate successor of Moses. He was moreover a military man, which Moses was not ; and he continued as chief of the people of Israel twenty-five years, that is from the time that Moses died, which, according to the bible chronology, was 1451 years before Christ, until 1426 years before Christ, when, according to the same chronology, Joshua died. If therefore we find in this book, said to have been written by Joshua, references to *facts done* after the death of Joshua, it is evident that Joshua could not be the author ; and also that the book could not have been written till after the time of the latest fact which it records. As to the character of the book, it is horrid. It is a military history of rapine and murder, as savage and brutal, as those recorded of his predecessor in villany and hypocrisy, Moses ; and the blasphemy consists, as in the former books, in ascribing those deeds to the orders of the Almighty.

In the first place, the book of Joshua, as is the case in the preceeding books, is written in the third person. It is the historian of Joshua that speaks; for it would have been absurd and vain glorious, that Joshua should say of himself, as is said of him, in the last verse of the 6th chapter, that *his fame was noised throughout all the country*. I now come more immediately to the proof.

In the 24th chapter, ver. 31, it is said, "And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and *all the days of the elders that over-lived Joshua*." How in the name of common sense, can it be Joshua that relates what people had done after he was dead? This account must not only have been written by some historian that lived after Joshua, but that lived also after the Elders that had out-lived Joshua.

There are several passages, of a general meaning with respect to time, scattered throughout the book of Joshua, that carries the time in which the book was written to a distance from the time of Joshua, but without marking by exclusion any particular time as in the passage above quoted. In that passage the time that intervened between the death of Joshua and the death of the Elders, is excluded descriptively and absolutely, and the evidence substantiates that the book could not have been written till after the death of the last.

But though the passages to which I allude, and which I am going to quote, do not designate any particular time by exclusion, they imply a time far more distant from the days of Joshua, than is contained between the death of Joshua and the death of the Elders. Such is the passage, chap. x. v. 14. where, after giving an account that the sun stood still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon at the command of Joshua (a tale fit only to amuse children)* the passage says—"And there was no day like that, before it, nor *after it*, that the Lord harkened to the voice of a man." The

* This tale of the sun standing still upon mount Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, is one of those fables that detects itself. Such a circumstance could not have happened without being known all over the whole world. One half would have wondered why the sun did not rise, and the other why it did not set, and the tradition of it would be universal; whereas there is not a nation in the world that knows any thing about

The time implied by the expression, *after it*, that is after *that day*, being put in comparison with all the time that passed *before it*, must, in order to give any expressive signification to the passage, mean a *great length of time*.—For example, it would have been ridiculous to have said so the next day or the next week, or the next month, or the next year. To give therefore meaning to the passage, comparative with the wonder it relates, and the prior time it alludes to, it must mean centuries of years. Less however than one would be trifling; and less than two would be barely admissible.

A distant but general time is also expressed in the 8th chapter, where, after giving an account of the taking the city Ai, it is said, ver. 28, “And Joshua burned Ai, and “made it an heap for ever, a desolation *unto this day*.” And again, ver. 29, where speaking of the king of Ai, whom Joshua had hanged, and buried at the entering of the gate, it is said, “And he raised thereon a great heap of “stones, which remaineth *unto this day* ;” that is unto the day or time in which the writer of the book of Joshua lived. And again, in the 10th chapter, where, after speaking of the five kings, whom Joshua had hanged on five trees, and then thrown in a cave, it is said, “And he “laid great stones on the cave’s mouth, which remain *unto this very day*.”

In enumerating the several exploits of Joshua and of the tribes and of the places which they conquered or attempted it is said, chap. xv, v. 63, “As for the Jebusites, the inhabitants

about it. But why must the moon stand still? What occasion could there be for moonlight in the day time, and that too while the sun shined? As a poetical figure, the whole is well enough; it is a-kin to that in the song of Deborah and Barak. *The stars in their courses fought against Sisera*; but it is inferior to the figurative declaration of Mahomet to the persons who came to expostulate with him on his goings on; *Wert thou, said he, to come to me with the sun in thy right hand, and the moon in thy left, it should not alter my career*. For Joshua, to have exceeded Mahomet, he should have put the sun and moon one in each pocket, and carried them as Guy Faux carried his dark lantern, and taken them out to shine as he might happen to want them. The sublime and the ridiculous are often so nearly related, that it is difficult to class them separately. One step above the sublime makes the ridiculous, and one step above the ridiculous makes the sublime again. The account however, abstracted from the poetical fancy, shews the ignorance of Joshua, for he should have commanded the earth to have stood still,

“habitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah, could not drive them out; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah *AT JERUSALEM unto this day* ;”—The question upon this passage is, at what time did the Jebusites and the children of Judah dwell together at Jerusalem? As this matter occurs again in the first chapter of Judges, I shall reserve my observations till I come to that part.

Having thus shewn from the book of Joshua itself, without any auxiliary evidence whatever, that Joshua is not the author of that book, and that it is anonymous, and consequently without authority, I proceed as before-mentioned to the book of Judges.

The book of Judges is anonymous on the face of it, and therefore even the pretence is wanting to call it the word of God. It has not so much as a nominal voucher. It is altogether fatherless.

This book begins with the same expression as the book of Joshua. That of Joshua begins chap. i. ver. 1. *Now after the death of Moses, &c.* And this of Judges begins; *Now after the death of Joshua, &c.* This and the similarity of style between the two books, indicate that they are the work of the same author; but who he was is altogether unknown. The only point that the book proves, is, that the author lived long after the time of Joshua; for though it begins as if it followed immediately after his death, the second chapter is an epitome or abstract of the whole book, which according to the bible chronology, extends its history through a space of three hundred and six years; that is, from the death of Joshua 1426 years before Christ, to the death of Samson, 1120 years before Christ, and only twenty-five years before Saul went to seek his father's asses and was made king; but there is good reason to believe that it was not written till the time of David at least, and that the book of Joshua was not written before the same time.

In the first chapter of Judges, the writer, after announcing the death of Joshua, proceeds to tell what happened between the children of Judah and the native inhabitants of the land of Canaan. In this statement, the writer, having abruptly mentioned *Jerusalem* in the 7th verse, says immediately after, in the 8th verse, by way of explanation, “Now the children of Judah *had* fought against Jerusalem and

and *taken it.*" Consequently this book could not have been written before Jerusalem had been taken. The reader will recollect the quotation I have just before made from the 15th chapter of Joshua, ver. 63, where it is said, that *the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem at this day*; meaning the time when the book of Joshua was written.

The evidence I have already produced to prove that the books I have hitherto treated of were not written by the persons to whom they are ascribed, nor till many years after their death, if such persons ever lived, is already so abundant, that I can afford to admit this passage with less weight than I am entitled to draw from it. For the case is, that so far as the bible can be credited as an history, the city of Jerusalem was not taken till the time of David, and consequently that the book of Joshua and of Judges were not written till after the commencement of the reign of David, which was 370 years after the death of Joshua.

The name of the city that was afterwards called Jerusalem, was originally Jebus or Jebusi, and was the capital of the Jebusites. The account of David's taking this city is given in 2 Samuel, chap. v. ver. 4, &c. also in 1 Chron. chap. xiv. v. 4, &c. There is no mention in any part of the bible that it was ever taken before, nor any account that favours such an opinion. It is not said, either in Samuel, or in Chronicles, that they *utterly destroyed men, women, and children—that they left not a soul to breathe*, as is said of their other conquests; and the silence here observed, implies that it was taken by capitulation, and that the Jebusites, the native inhabitants, continued to live in the place after it was taken. The account therefore given in Joshua, that *the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem at this day*, corresponds to no other time than after the taking the city by David.

Having now shewn that every book in the bible, from Genesis to Judges, is without authenticity, I come to the book of *Ruth*—an idle bundling story, foolishly told, nobody knows by whom, about a strolling country girl creeping sily to-bed to her cousin Boaz. Pretty stuff indeed to be called the word of God! It is, however, one of the best books in the bible, for it is free from murder and rapine.

I come next to the two books of Samuel; and to shew that those books were not written by Samuel, nor till a great length of time after the death of Samuel, and that they are, like all the former books, anonymous, and without authority.

To be convinced that these books have been written much later than the time of Samuel, and consequently not by him, it is only necessary to read the account which the writer gives of Saul going to seek his father's asses, and of his interview with Samuel, of whom Saul went to enquire about those lost asses, as foolish people now-a-days go to a conjurer to enquire after lost things.

The writer, in relating this story of Saul, Samuel, and the asses, does not tell it as a thing that had just then happened, but as an *ancient story in the time this writer lived*; for he tells it in the language or terms used at the time that Samuel lived, which obliges the writer to explain the story in the terms or language used in the time the writer lived.

Samuel, in the account given of him in the first of those books, chap. ix. is called *the Seer*; and it is by this term that Saul enquires after him, ver. 11. "And as they (Saul and his servant) went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water; and they said unto them, *Is the Seer here?*" Saul then went according to the direction of these maidens, and met Samuel without knowing him, and said to him, ver. 18, "Tell me, I pray thee, *where the Seer's house is?*" And Samuel answered Saul, and said, *I am the Seer.*

As the writer of the book of Samuel relates these questions and answers in the language or manner of speaking used in the time they are said to have been spoken; and as that manner of speaking was out of use when this author wrote, he found it necessary, in order to make the story understood, to explain the terms in which these questions and answers are spoken. And he does this in the 9th verse, where he says—"Before-time in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, come let us go to the Seer; for he that is now called a prophet, was before-time called a Seer." This proves, as I have before said, that this story of Saul, Samuel, and the asses, was an ancient story at the time the book of Samuel was written, and consequently

consequently that Samuel did not write it, and that the book is without authenticity.

But if we go further into those books, the evidence is still more positive, that Samuel is not the writer of them; for they relate things that did not happen till several years after the death of Samuel. Samuel died before Saul; for the 1st of Samuel, chap. xxviii. tells, that Saul and the witch of Endor conjured Samuel up after he was dead; yet the history of matters contained in those books is extended through the remaining part of Saul's life, and to the latter end of the life of David, who succeeded Saul. The account of the death and burial of Samuel, (a thing which he could not write himself) is related in the 25th chapter of the first book of Samuel; and the chronology affixed to this chapter, makes this to be 1060 years before Christ; yet the history of this *first* book is brought down to 1056 years before Christ, that is, to the death of Saul, which was not till four years after the death of Samuel.

The second book of Samuel begins with an account of things that did not happen till four years after Samuel was dead; for it begins with the reign of David, who succeeded Saul, and it goes on to the end of David's reign, which was forty-three years after the death of Samuel; and therefore the books are in themselves positive evidence that they were not written by Samuel.

I have now gone through all the books in the first part of the bible to which the names of persons are affixed as being the authors of those books, and which the church, styling itself the Christian church, have imposed upon the world as the writings of Moses, Joshua and Samuel, and I have detected and proved the falshood of this imposition. —And now ye priests of every description, who have preached and written against the former part of the *Age of Reason*, what have ye to say? Will ye, with all this mass of evidence against you, and staring you in the face, still have the assurance to march into your pulpits, and continue to impose these books on your congregations as the works of *inspired penmen*, and the word of God; when it is as evident as demonstration can make truth appear, that the persons who, ye say, are the authors, are *not* the authors, and that ye know not who the authors are.

are. What shadow of pretence have ye now to produce for continuing the blasphemous fraud? What have ye still to offer against the pure and moral religion of Deism, in support of your system of falshood, idolatry, and pretended revelation?

Had the cruel and murdering orders with which the bible is filled, and the numberless torturing executions of men, women and children, in consequence of those orders, been ascribed to some friend, whose memory you revered, you would have glowed with satisfaction at detecting the falshood of the charge, and gloried in defending his injured fame. It is because ye are sunk in the cruelty of superstition, or feel no interest in the honor of your Creator, that ye listen to the horrid tales of the bible, or hear them with callous indifference. The evidence I have produced, and shall still produce, in the course of this work, to prove that the bible is without authority, will, whilst it wounds the stubbornness of a priest, relieve and tranquilize the mind of millions. It will free them from all those hard thoughts of the Almighty, which priest-craft and the bible had infused into their mind, and which stood in everlasting opposition to all their ideas of his moral justice and benevolence.

I come now to the two books of Kings, and the two books of Chronicles. Those books are altogether historical and are chiefly confined to the lives and actions of the Jewish kings who in general were a parcel of rascals; but these are matters with which we have no more concern than we have with the Roman emperors, or Homer's account of the Trojan war. Besides which, as those books are anonymous, and as we know nothing of the writer or of his character, it is impossible for us to know what degree of credit to give to the matters related therein. Like all other ancient histories, they appear to be a jumble of fable and of fact, and of probable and of improbable things, but which distance of time and place, and change of circumstances in the world, have rendered obsolete, and uninteresting.

The chief use I shall make of those books will be that of comparing them with each other, and with other parts of the bible, to shew the confusion, contradiction, and cruelty, in this pretended word of God. The

The first book of Kings begins with the reign of Solomon, which, according to the bible chronology, was 1015 years before Christ; and the second book ends 588 years before Christ, being a little after the reign of Zedekiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, after taking Jerusalem, and conquering the Jews, carried captive to Babylon. The two books include a space of four hundred and twenty-seven years.

The two books of Chronicles are an history of the same times, and in general of the same persons by another author; for it would be absurd to suppose that the same author wrote the history twice over. The first book of Chronicles (after giving the genealogy from Adam to Saul which takes up the first nine chapters) begins with the reign of David, and the last book ends as in the last book of Kings, soon after the reign of Zedekiah, about 588 years before Christ. The two last verses of the last chapter bring the history fifty-two years more forward, that is, to 536. But these verses do not belong to the book, as I shall shew when I come to speak of the book of Ezra.

The two books of Kings, besides the history of Saul, David and Solomon, who reigned over *all* Israel, contain an abstract of the lives of seventeen kings and one queen, who are stiled kings of Judah, and of nineteen who are stiled kings of Israel; for the Jewish nation, immediately on the death of Solomon, split into two parties, who chose separate kings, and who carried on most rancorous wars against each other.

These two books are little more than a history of assassinations, treachery, and wars. The cruelties that the Jews had accustomed themselves to practise on the Canaanites, whose country they had savagely invaded under a pretended gift from God, they afterwards practised as furiously on each other. Scarcely half their kings died a natural death, and in some instances whole families were destroyed to secure possession to the successor, who, after a few years, and sometimes only a few months, or less, shared the same fate. In the tenth chapter of the second book of Kings, an account is given of two baskets full of children's heads, seventy in number, being exposed at the entrance of the city; they were the children of Ahab, and

and were murdered by the orders of Jehu, whom Elisha, the pretended man of God, had anointed to be king over Israel, on purpose to commit this bloody deed, and assassinate his predecessor. And in the account of the reign of Manaham, one of the kings of Israel, who had murdered Shallum, who had reigned but one month, it is said, 2 Kings, chap. xv. ver. 16, that Manaham smote the city of Tiphshah, because they opened not the city to him, *and all the women therein that were with child, he ript up.*

Could we permit ourselves to suppose that the Almighty would distinguish any nation of people by the name of *his chosen people*, we must suppose that people to have been an example to all the rest of the world of the purest piety and humanity ; and not such a nation of ruffians and cut-throats as the ancient Jews were. A people who, corrupted by, and copying after such monsters and imposters as Moses and Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, and David, had distinguished themselves above all others, on the face of the known earth, for barbarity and wickedness. If we will not stubbornly shut our eyes, and steel our hearts, it is impossible not to see, in spite of all that long-established superstition imposes upon the mind, that the flattering appellation of *his chosen people*, is no other than a LIE, which the priests and leaders of the Jews had invented to cover the baseness of their own characters, and which Christian priests, sometimes as corrupt, and often as cruel, have professed to believe.

The two books of Chronicles are a repetition of the same crimes ; but the history is broken in several places by the author leaving out the reign of some of their kings ; and in this as well as in that of Kings, there is such a frequent transition from kings of Judah to kings of Israel, and from kings of Israel to kings of Judah, that the narrative is obscure in the reading. In the same book the history sometimes contradicts itself. For example, in the second book of Kings, chap. i. ver. 17, we are told, but in rather ambiguous terms, that after the death of Ahaziah, king of Israel, Jehoram or Joram (who was of the house of Ahab) reigned in his stead in the *second year* of Jehoram or Joram, son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah ;—and in chap.

chap. viii. ver. 16. of the same book, it is said, "And in the *fifth* year of Joram, the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat, being then king of Judah, Jeroboam, the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, began to reign;" that is, one chapter says, that Joram of Judah began to reign in the *second* year of Joram of Israel; and the other chapter says, that Joram of Israel began to reign in the *fifth* year of Joram of Judah.

Several of the most extraordinary matters related in one history, as having happened during the reign of such or such of their kings, are not to be found in the other in relating the reign of the same king. For example, the two first rival kings after the death of Solomon, were Rehoboam and Jeroboam; and in 1 Kings, chap. xii. and xiii. an account is given of Jeroboam making an offering of burnt-incense, and that a man, who is there called a man of God, cried out against the altar, ch. xiii. ver. 2. "O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord, behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burnt incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burned upon thee."—Verse 3. "And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Bethel, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, *Lay hold on him*; and his hand which he put out against him, *dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him.*"

One would think that such an extraordinary case as this, (which is spoken of as a judgment) happening to the chief of one of the parties, and that at the first moment of the separation of the Israelites into two nations would, if it had been true, been recorded in both histories. But though men in latter times have believed *all that the prophets have said unto them*, it does not appear that those prophets or historians believed each other. They knew each other too well.

A long account also is given in Kings about Elijah. It runs through several chapters, and concludes with telling, 2 kings, chap. ii. ver. 11. "And it came to pass as they [Elijah and Elisha] still went on, and talked, that behold there appeared *a chariot of fire, and horses of fire*, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into

"into heaven." *Hum!* This the author of Chronicles, miraculous as the story is, makes no mention of, though he mentions Elijah by name. Neither does he say any thing of the story related in the second chapter of the same book of Kings, of a parcel of children calling Elijah, *bald-head, bald-head*; and that this *man of God*, ver. 24, "turned back, and looked upon them, and *curst them in the name of the Lord*; and there came forth two she-bears out of the woods, and tare forty and two children of them." He also passes over in silence the story told, 2 Kings chap. xiii. that when they were burying a man in the sepulchre where Elisha had been buried, it happened that the dead man as they were letting him down, (ver. 21.) "touched the bones of Elisha, and he (the dead man) *revived, and stood upon his feet*." The story does not tell us, whether they buried the man, notwithstanding he revived and stood upon his feet, or drew him up again.—Upon all these stories, the writer of the Chronicles is as silent as any writer of the present day, who did not chuse to be accused of *lying*, or at least of *romancing*, would be about stories of the same kind.

But, however these two historians may differ from each other with respect to the tales related by either, they are silent alike with respect to those men stiled prophets, whose writings fill up the latter part of the bible. Isaiah, who lived in the time of Hezekiah, is mentioned in Kings, and again in Chronicles, when these histories are speaking of that reign; but except in one, or two instances at most, and those very slightly, none of the rest are so much as spoken of, or even their existence hinted at, though, according to the bible chronology, they lived within the time those histories were written, and some of them long before. If those prophets, as they are called, were men of such importance in their day, as the compilers of the bible and priests and commentators have since represented them to be, how can it be accounted for, that not one of those histories should say any thing about them?

The history in the books of Kings and of Chronicles is brought forward, as I have already said, to the year 588 before Christ. It will therefore be proper to examine which of those prophets lived before that period. Here follows

follows a table of all the prophets, with the times in which they lived before Christ, according to the chronology affixed to the first chapter of each of the books of the prophets, and also of the number of years they lived before the books of Kings and Chronicles were written.

TABLE

TABLE of the prophets, with the times in which they lived before Christ, and also before the books of Kings and Chronicles were written.

Names.	Years before Christ	Years before Kings and Chron.	Observations.
Isaiah.	760	172	mentioned.
Jeremiah.	629	41	{ mentioned only in the last chap. of Chronicles.
Ezekiel.	595	7	not mentioned.
Daniel.	607	19	not mentioned.
Hosea.	785	97	not mentioned.
Joel.	800	212	not mentioned.
Amos.	789	199	not mentioned.
Obadiah.	789	199	not mentioned.
Jonah.	862	274	see the note.*
Micah.	750	162	not mentioned.
Nahum.	713	125	not mentioned.
Habbakuk.	626	38	not mentioned.
Zephaniah.	630	42	not mentioned.
Haggi Zechariah Malachi. }	after the year 588		

This table is either not very honourable for the bible historians, or not very honourable for the bible prophets; and I leave it to priests and commentators, who are very learned in little things, to settle the point of *etiquette* between the two; and to assign a reason why the authors of Kings and of Chronicles have treated those prophets, whom, in the former part of the Age of Reason, I have considered as poets, with as much degrading silence as an historian of the present day would treat Peter Pindar.

I have one more observation to make on the book of
Chronicles,

* In 2 Kings, chap. xiv. ver. 25, the name of Jonah is mentioned on account of the restoration of a tract of land by Jeroboam; but nothing further is said of him, nor is any allusion made to the book of Jonah, nor to his expedition to Nineveh, nor to his encounter with the whale.

Chronicles, after which I shall pass on to review the remaining books of the bible.

In my observations on the book of Genesis, I have quoted a passage from the 36th chapter, ver. 31, which evidently refers to a time *after* that kings began to reign over the children of Israel; and I have shewn, that as this verse is verbatim the same as in 1 Chron. chap. i. ver. 43, where it stands consistently with the order of history, which in Genesis it does not, that the verse in Genesis and a great part of the 36th chapter, have been taken from Chronicles; and that the book of Genesis, though it is placed first in the bible, and ascribed to Moses, has been manufactured by some unknown person after the book of Chronicles was written, which was not until at least eight hundred and sixty years after the time of Moses.

The evidence I proceed by to substantiate this is regular, and has in it but two stages. First, as I have already stated, that the passage in Genesis refers itself for *time* to Chronicles. Secondly, that the book of Chronicles to which this passage refers itself, was not *began* to be written until at least eight hundred and sixty years after the time of Moses. To prove this, we have only to look into the thirteenth verse of the third chapter of the first book of Chronicles, where the writer, in giving the genealogy of the descendants of David, mentions *Zedekiah*: and it was in the time of *Zedekiah* that Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem 588 years before Christ, and consequently more than 860 years after Moses. Those who have superstitiously boasted of the antiquity of the bible, and particularly of the books ascribed to Moses, have done it without examination and without any other authority than that of one credulous man telling it to another; for, so far as historical and chronological evidence applies, the very first book in the bible is not so ancient as the book of Homer, by more than three hundred years, and is about the same age with Æsop's fables.

I am not contending for the morality of Homer; on the contrary, I think it to be a book of false glory and tending to instil immoral and mischievous notions of honour; and with respect to Æsop, though the moral is in general just, the fable is often cruel; and the cruelty of
the

the fable does more injury to the heart, especially in a child, than the moral does good to the judgment.

Having now dismissed Kings and Chronicles, I come to the next in course, the book of Ezra.

As one proof, among others I shall produce to shew the disorder in which this pretended word of God, the bible, has been put together, and the uncertainty of who the authors were, we have only to look at the three first verses in Ezra, and the two last in Chronicles; for by what kind of cutting and shuffling has it been, that the three first verses in Ezra should be the two last verses in Chronicles, or that the two last in Chronicles should be the three first in Ezra. Either the authors did not know their own works, or the compilers did not know the authors.

Two last verses of Chronicles. Three first verses of Ezra.

Verse 22. Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah, might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also into writing, saying,	Verse 1. Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord, by the mouth of Jeremiah, might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also into writing, saying,
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23. Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, all the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.	2. Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, the Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah,
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Who is there among you of all his people? The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up.	3. Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him; and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem.
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§ The

✂ The last verse in Chronicles is broken abruptly, and ends in the middle of a phrase with the word *up*, without signifying to what place. This abrupt break, and the appearance of the same verses in different books, shew, as I have already said, the disorder and ignorance in which the bible has been put together, and that the compilers of it had no authority for what they were doing, nor we any authority for believing what they have done.*

The only thing that has any appearance of certainty in the book of Ezra is the time in which it was written, which

* I observed, as I passed along, several broken and senseless passages in the bible without thinking them of consequence enough to be introduced in the body of the work; such as that, 1 Samuel, chap. xiii. ver. 1, where it is said, "Saul reigned *one year*; and when he had reigned *two years* over Israel; Saul chose him three thousand men," etc. The first part of the verse, that Saul reigned *one year*, has no sense, since it does not tell us what Saul did, nor say any thing of what happened, at the end of *that one year*; and it is, besides, mere absurdity to say he reigned *one year* when the very next phrase says he had reigned two, for if he had reigned two it was impossible not to have reigned one.

Another instance occurs in Joshua, chap. v. where the writer tells a story of an angel (for such the table of contents at the head of the chapter calls him) appearing unto Joshua, and the story ends abruptly and without any conclusion. The story is as follows—Verse 13. "And it came to pass when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lift up his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: And Joshua went unto him and said unto him, art thou for us or for our adversaries?" Verse 14. And he said, nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and did *worship*, and said unto him, *What saith my Lord unto his servant?* Verse 15. And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so." And what then? nothing; for here the story ends, and the chapter too.

Either this story is broken off in the middle, or it is a story told by some Jewish humourist in ridicule of Joshua's pretended mission from God; and the compilers of the bible not perceiving the design of the story, has told it as a serious matter. As a story of humour and ridicule, it has a great deal of point; for it pompously introduces an angel in the figure of a man, with a drawn sword in his hand, before whom Joshua *falls on his face to the earth and worships* (which is contrary to their second commandment) and then this most important embassy from heaven ends, in telling Joshua to *pull off his shoe*: It might as well have told him to pull up his breeches.

It is certain, however, that the Jews did not credit every thing their leaders told them, as appears from the cavalier manner in which they speak of Moses when he was gone into the mount, "As for *this* Moses, say they, *we wot not what is become of him.*" Ex. chap. xxxii. ver. 1.

which was immediately after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, about 536 years before Christ. Ezra (who according to the Jewish commentators, is the same person as is called Esdras in the Apocrypha) was one of the persons who returned, and who it is probable wrote the account of that affair. Nehemiah, whose book follows next to Ezra, was another of the returned persons, and who it is also probable wrote the account of the same affair in the book that bears his name. But those accounts are nothing to us, nor to any other person, unless it be to the Jews, as a part of the history of their nation; and there is just as much of the word of God in those books as there is in any of the histories of France, or Rapin's history of England or the history of any other country.

But even in matters of historical record, neither of those writers are to be depended upon. In the second chapter of Ezra the writer gives a list of the tribes and families and of the precise number of souls of each, that returned from Babylon to Jerusalem; and this enrolment of the persons so returned, appears to have been one of the principal objects for writing the book; but in this there is an error that destroys the intention of the undertaking.

The writer begins his enrollment in the following manner, chap. ii. ver. 3. "The children of Parosli two thousand one hundred seventy and four." Ver. 4. "The children of Shephatiah three hundred seventy and two." And in this manner he proceeds through all the families; and in the 64th verse, he makes a total, and says, "The whole congregation together was, *forty and two thousand, three hundred and threescore.*"

But whoever will take the trouble of casting up the several particulars, will find that the total is but 29,818; so that

that the error is 12,542.* What certainty then can there be in the bible for any thing?

Nehemiah, in like manner, gives a list of the returned families, and of the number of each family. He begins, as in Ezra, by saying, chap. vii. ver. 8, "The children of Parosh two thousand three hundred and seventy-two;" and so on through all the families. This list differs in several of the particulars from that of Ezra. In the 66th verse, Nehemiah makes a total, and says as Ezra had said "The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threecore," But the particulars of this list make a total of but 31,089, so that the error here is 11,271. These writers may do well enough for bible-makers; but not for any thing where truth and exactness is necessary.

The next book in course is the book of Esther. If Madam Esther thought it any honour to offer herself as a kept mistress to Ahasuerus, or as a rival to queen Vashti, who had refused to come to a drunken king, in the midst of a drunken company, to be made a shew of (for the account says, they had been drinking seven days and were merry) let Esther and Mordecai look to that. It is no business of ours, at least is none of mine; besides which, the story has a great deal the appearance of being fabulous, and is also anonymous. I pass on to the book of Job.

The book of Job differs in character from all the books we have hitherto passed over. Treachery and murder make

* Particulars of the families from the second chapter of Ezra.

Chap. ii.		Bt ford	11,577	Bt ford	15,783	Bt ford	19,444
Ver. 3	2172	V. 13	666	V. 23	128	V. 33	725
4	372	14	2056	24	42	34	345
5	775	15	454	25	743	35	3630
6	2812	16	98	26	621	36	973
7	1254	17	323	27	122	37	1632
8	945	18	212	28	223	38	1247
9	760	19	223	29	52	39	1017
10	642	20	95	30	156	40	74
11	623	21	123	31	1254	41	128
12	1222	22	56	32	320	42	139
						58	392
						60	652
	11,577		15,783		19,444		

TOTAL 29,818

make no part of this book. It is the meditations of a mind strongly impressed with the vicissitudes of human life, and by turns sinking under, and struggling against, the pressure. It is a highly wrought composition between willing submission and involuntary discontent ; and shews man as he sometimes is, more disposed to be resigned than he is capable of being. Patience has but a small share in the character of the person of whom the book treats ; on the contrary, his grief is often impetuous ; but he still endeavours to keep a guard upon it, and seems determined, in the midst of accumulated ills, to impose upon himself the hard duty of contentment.

I have spoken in a respectful manner of the book of Job in the former part of the *Age of Reason*, but without knowing at that time what I have learned since, which is, that from all the evidence that can be collected, the book of Job does not belong to the bible.

I have seen the opinion of two Hebrew commentators, Abenhezra and Spinosa, upon this subject. They both say that the book of Job carries no internal evidence of being an Hebrew book ; that the genus of the composition, and the drama of the piece, are not Hebrew ; that it has been translated from another language into Hebrew, and that the author of the book was a Gentile ; that the character represented under the name of Satan (which is the first and only time this name is mentioned in the bible) does not correspond to any Hebrew idea ; and that the two convocations which the Deity is supposed to have made of those whom the poem calls sons of God, and the familiarity which this supposed Satan is stated to have with the Deity, are in the same case.

It may also be observed, that the book shews itself to be the production of a mind cultivated in science, which the Jews so far from being famous for, were very ignorant of. The allusions to objects of natural philosophy are frequent and strong, and are of a different cast to any thing in the books known to be Hebrew. The astronomical names Pleiades, Orion, and Arcturus, are Greek, and not Hebrew names ; and as it does not appear from any thing that is to be found in the bible, that the Jews knew any thing of astronomy, or that they studied it, they had no translation
for

for those names into their own language, but adopted the names as they found them in the poem.

That the Jews did translate the literary productions of the Gentile nations into the Hebrew language, and mix them with their own, is not a matter of doubt. The 31st chapter of Proverbs is an evidence of this. It is there said, ver. 1. *The words of King Lemuel, the prophecy which his mother taught him.* This verse stands as a preface to the proverbs that follow, and which are not the proverbs of Solomon, but of Lemuel; and this Lemuel was not one of the kings of Israel, nor of Judah, but of some other country, and consequently a Gentile. The Jews, however, have adopted his proverbs; and as they cannot give any account who the author of the book of Job was, nor how they came by the book, and as it differs in character from the Hebrew writings, and stands totally unconnected with every other book and chapter in the bible before it, and after it, it has all the circumstantial evidence of being originally a book of the Gentiles.*

The bible-makers and those regulators of time the bible chronologists, appear to have been at a loss where to place, and how to dispose of, the book of Job; for it contains no one historical circumstance, nor allusion to any, that might serve to determine its place in the bible. But it would not have answered the purpose of these men to have informed the world of their ignorance; and therefore they have

* The prayer known by the name of *Augur's prayer*, in the 30th chapter of Proverbs, immediately preceeding the proverbs of Lemuel, and which is the only sensible, and well conceived and well expressed prayer in the bible, has much the appearance of being a prayer taken from the Gentiles. The name of Augur occurs on no other occasion than this; and he is introduced together with the prayer ascribed to him, in the same manner, and nearly in the same words, that Lemuel and his proverbs are introduced in the chapter that follows. The first verse of the 30th chapter says, "*The words of Augur the son of Jakeb even the prophecy.*" Here the word prophecy is used with the same application it has in the following chapter of Lemuel, unconnected with any thing of prediction. The prayer of Augur is in the 8th and 9th verses—"Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither riches nor poverty, but feed me with food convenient for me; Lest I be full and deny thee, and say who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." This has not any marks of being a Jewish prayer; for the Jews never prayed but when they were in trouble, and never for any thing but victory, vengeance or riches,

have affixed to it the æra of 1520 years before Christ, which is during the time the Israelites were in Egypt ; and for which they have just as much authority, and no more, than I should have for saying it was a thousand years before that period. The probability however, is, that it is older than any book in the bible ; and it is the only one that can be read without indignation or disgust.

We know nothing of what the ancient Gentile world (as it is called) was before the time of the Jews, whose practice has been to calumniate and blacken the character of all other nations : and it is from the Jewish accounts that we have learned to call them heathen. But as far as we know to the contrary, they were a just and a moral people, and not addicted, like the Jews, to cruelty and revenge, but of whose profession of faith we are unacquainted. It appears to have been their custom to personify both virtue and vice by statues and images, as is done now a days both by statuary and by painting ; but it does not follow from this, that they worshipped them any more than we do. I pass on to the book of,

PSALMS, of which it is not necessary to make much observation. Some of them are moral, and others are very revengeful, and the greater part relates to certain local circumstances of the Jewish nation at the time they were written, with which we have nothing to do. It is however, an error or an imposition to call them the Psalms of David. They are a collection, as song-books are now-a-days, from different song-writers, who lived at different times. The 137th Psalm could not have been written till more than four hundred years after the time of David, because it was written in commemoration of an event, the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, which did not happen till that distance of time. *By the rivers of Babylon we sat down ; yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows, in the midst thereof ; for there they that carried us away captive, required of us a song, saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion."* As a man would say to an American, or to a Frenchman, or to an Englishman, sing us one of your American songs, or your French songs, or your English songs. This remark, with respect to the time this psalm was written, is of no other use than

to shew (among others already mentioned) the general imposition the world has been under with respect to the authors of the bible. No regard has been paid to time, place and circumstance, and the names of persons have been affixed to the several books, which it was as impossible they should write as that a man should walk in procession at his own funeral.

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS. These, like the Psalms, are a collection, and that from authors belonging to other nations than those of the Jewish nation, as I have shewn in the observations upon the book of Job : besides which, some of the proverbs ascribed to Solomon did not appear till two hundred and fifty years after the death of Solomon ; for it is said in the first verse of the 25th chapter, "*These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah copied out.*" It was two hundred and fifty years from the time of Solomon to the time of Hezekiah. When a man is famous, and his name is abroad, he is made the putative father of things he never said or did, and this most probably has been the case with Solomon. It appears to have been the fashion of that day to make proverbs, as it is now to make *Fest-books*, and father them upon those who never saw them.

The book of *Ecclesiastes*, or the *Preacher*, is also ascribed to Solomon, and that with much reason, if not with truth. It is written as the solitary reflections of a worn-out debauchee, such as Solomon was, who looking back on scenes he can no longer enjoy, cries out, *all is vanity!* A great deal of the metaphor and of the sentiment is obscure, most probably by translation, but enough is left to shew they were strongly pointed in the original.* From what is transmitted to us of the character of Solomon, he was witty, ostentatious, dissolute, and at last melancholy. He lived fast, and died, tired of the world, at the age of fifty-eight years.

Seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines, are worse than none ; and however it may carry with it the appearance of heightened enjoyment, it defeats all the felicity of affection, by leaving it no point to fix upon.

* *Those that look out of the window shall be darkened ;* is an obscure figure in translation for loss of sight.

Divided love is never happy. This was the case with Solomon, and if he could not, with all his pretensions to wisdom, discover it before-hand, he merited, unpitied, the mortification he afterwards endured. In this point of view his preaching is unnecessary, because to know the consequences, it is only necessary to know the cause. Seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines would have stood in place of the whole book. It was needless after this to say, that all was vanity and vexation of spirit; for it is impossible to derive happiness from the company of those whom we deprive of happiness.

To be happy in old age, it is necessary that we accustom ourselves to objects that can accompany the mind all the way through life, and that we take the rest as good in their day. The mere man of pleasure is miserable in old age, and the mere drudge in business is but little better: whereas natural philosophy, mathematical, and mechanical science, are a continual source of tranquil pleasure; and in spite of the gloomy dogma of priests and of superstition, the study of those things is the study of the true theology. It teaches man to know and to admire the Creator, for the principles of science are in the creation, and are unchangeable, and of divine origin.

Those who knew Benjamin Franklin will recollect that his mind was ever young; his temper ever serene, Science, that never grows grey, was always his mistress. He was never without an object; for when we cease to have an object, we become like an invalid in an hospital waiting for death.

SOLOMON'S SONGS, amorous and foolish enough, but which wrinkled fanaticism, has called divine. The compilers of the bible have placed these songs after the book of Ecclesiastes, and the chronologists have affixed to them the æra of 1014 years before Christ, at which time Solomon, according to the same chronology, was nineteen years of age, and was then forming his seraglio of wives and concubines. The bible makers or the chronologists should have managed this matter a little better, and either have said nothing about the time, or chosen a time less inconsistent with the supposed divinity of those songs; for Solomon was then in the honey-moon of *one thousand* debaucheries.

It should also have occurred to them, that as he wrote, if he did write, the book of Ecclesiastes long after these songs, and in which he exclaims, that all is vanity and vexation of spirit, that he included those songs in that description. This is the more probable, because he says, or somebody for him, Ecclesiastes, chap. ii. ver. 8. *I got me men-singers, and women-singers, (most probably to sing those songs) and musical instruments of all sorts, and behold (ver. 11) all was vanity and vexation of spirit.* The compilers, however, have done their work but by halves; for as they have given us the songs, they should have given us the tunes that we might sing them.

THE BOOKS called the books of the Prophets fill up all the remaining part of the bible. They are sixteen in number, beginning with Isaiah and ending with Malachi, of which I have given a list in the observations upon Chronicles. Of these sixteen prophets, all of whom, except the three last, lived within the time the books of Kings and Chronicles were written, two only, Isaiah and Jeremiah, are mentioned in the history of those books. I shall begin with those two, reserving what I have to say on the general character of the men called prophets, to another part of the work.

Whoever will take the trouble of reading the book ascribed to Isaiah, will find it one of the most wild and disorderly compositions ever put together. It has neither beginning, middle, nor end; and except a short historical part, and a few sketches of history in two or three of the first chapters, is one continued incoherent bombastical rant, full of extravagant metaphor, without application, and destitute of meaning. A school-boy would scarcely have been excusable for writing such stuff. It is at least (in translation) that kind of composition and false taste, that is properly called prose run mad.

The historical part begins at the 26th chapter, and is continued to the end of the 39th chapter. It relates some matters that are said to have passed during the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah, at which time Isaiah lived. This fragment of history begins and ends abruptly. It has not the least connection with the chapter that precedes it, nor with that which follows it, nor with any other in the

book. It is probable that Isaiah wrote this fragment himself, because he was an actor in the circumstances it treats of; but except this part, there are scarcely two chapters that have any connection with each other. One is entitled, at the beginning of the first verse, the Burden of Babylon; another, the Burden of Moab; another, the Burden of Damascus; another, the Burden of Egypt; another, the Burden of the Desert of the Sea; another, the Burden of the Valley of Vision: as you would say, the story of the knight of the burning mountain; the story of Cinderella or the glassen slipper; the story of the sleeping beauty in the wood, &c. &c.

I have already shewn in the instance of the two last verses of Chronicles, and the three first in Ezra, that the compilers of the bible mixed and confounded the writings of different authors with each other; which alone, were there no other cause, is sufficient to destroy the authenticity of any compilation, because it is more than presumptive evidence that the compilers are ignorant who the authors were. A very glaring instance of this occurs in the book ascribed to Isaiah. The latter part of the 44th chapter and the beginning of the 45th, so far from having been written by Isaiah, could only have been written by some person who lived at least an hundred and fifty years after Isaiah was dead.

These chapters are a compliment to *Cyrus*, who permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity, to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, as is stated in Ezra. The last verse of the 44th chapter, and the beginning of the 45th, are in the following words: *That saith of Cyrus, he is my shepherd and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the Temple, thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden to subdue nations before him, and I will loose the loins of kings to open before him the two-leaved gates, and the gates shall not be shut. I will go before thee, &c.*

What audacity of church and priestly ignorance it is to impose this book upon the world as the writing of Isaiah? when Isaiah, according to their own chronology, died soon after the death of Hezekiah, which was six hundred and ninety-

ninety-eight years before Christ ; and the decree of Cyrus in favour of the Jews returning to Jerusalem, was, according to the same chronology, 536 years before Christ, which is a distance of time between the two of one hundred and sixty-two years. I do not suppose that the compilers of the bible made these books, but rather that they picked up some loose anonymous essays, and put them together under the names of such authors as best suited their purpose. They have encouraged the imposition, which is next to inventing it ; for it was impossible but they must have observed it.

When we see the studied craft of the scripture-makers, in making every part of this romantic book of school-boys eloquence, bend to the monstrous idea of a son of God, begotten by a ghost on the body of a virgin, there is no imposition we are not justified in suspecting them of. Every phrase and circumstance are marked with the barbarous hand of superstitious torture, and forced into meanings it was impossible they could have. The head of every chapter, and the top of every page, are blazoned with the names of Christ and the church, that the unwearied reader might suck in the error before he began to read.

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son. Isaiah, chap. vii. ver. 14, has been interpreted to mean the person called Jesus Christ, and his mother Mary, and has been echoed through Christendom for more than a thousand years : and such has been the rage of this opinion, that scarcely a spot in it but has been stained with blood, and marked with desolation in consequence of it. Though it is not my intention to enter into controversy on subjects of this kind, but to confine myself to shew that the bible is spurious, and thus, by taking away the foundation to overthrow at once the whole structure of superstition raised thereon ; I will, however, stop a moment to expose the fallacious application of this passage.

Whether Isaiah was playing a trick with a Ahaz, king of Judah, to whom this passage is spoken, is no business of mine. I mean only to show the misapplication of the passage,

sage, and that it has no more reference to Christ and his mother, can it has to me and my mother. The story is simply this :

The king of Syria and the king of Israel, (I have already mentioned that the Jews were split into two nations, one of which was called Judah, the capital of which was Jerusalem, and the other Israel) made war jointly against Ahaz, king of Judah, and marched their armies towards Jerusalem. Ahaz and his people became alarmed, and the account says, ver. 2. "*Their hearts were moved as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.*"

In this situation of things, Isaiah addresses himself to Ahaz, and assures him in the *name of the Lord*, the cant phrase of all the prophets, that these two kings should not succeed against him ; and to satisfy Ahaz that this should be the case, tells him to ask a sign : this, the account says, Ahaz declined doing, giving as a reason, that he would not tempt the Lord : upon which, Isaiah, who is the speaker, says, ver. 14. "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign, *Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bare a son ;*" and the 16th verse says, "*And before this child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land which thou abhorrest (or darest, meaning Syria and the kingdom of Israel) shall be forsaken of both her kings.*" Here then was the sign, and the time limited for the completion of the assurance or promise ; namely, before this child should know to refuse the evil and chuse the good.

Isaiah having committed himself thus far, it became necessary to him, in order to avoid the imputation of being a false prophet, and the consequences thereof, to take measures to make this sign appear. It certainly was not a difficult thing in any time of the world, to find a girl with child, or to make her so ; and perhaps Isaiah knew of one before hand ; for I do not suppose that the prophets of that day were any more to be trusted than the priests of this. Be that, however as it may, he says in the next chapter, ver. 2. "And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, and I went unto the prophetess, and she conceived and bare a son."

Here then is the whole story, foolish as it is, of this child

child and this virgin. And it is upon the barefaced perversion of this story, that the book of Matthew, and the impudence and sordid interest of priests in latter times, have founded a theory which they call the gospel; and have applied this story to signify the person they call Jesus Christ, begotten, they say, by a ghost whom they call holy, on the body of a woman engaged in marriage and afterwards married, whom they call virgin, seven hundred years after this foolish story was told: a theory which, speaking for myself, I hesitate not to believe and to say, is as fabulous and as false as God is true.*

But to shew the imposition and falshood of Isaiah, we have only to attend to the sequel of this story, which tho' it is passed over in silence in the book of Isaiah, is related, in the 28th chapter of 2 Chronicles, and which is, that, instead of these two kings failing in their attempt against Ahaz, king of Judah, as Isaiah had pretended to foretel in the name of the Lord, they *succeeded*: Ahaz was defeated and destroyed, an hundred and twenty thousand of his people were slaughtered, Jerusalem was plundered, and two hundred thousand women, and sons and daughters, carried into captivity. Thus more for this lying prophet and impostor Isaiah, and the book of falshoods that bears his name. I pass on the book of

JEREMIAH. This prophet, as he is called, lived in the time that Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, in the reign of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, and the suspicion was strong against him, that he was a traitor in the interest of Nebuchadnezzar. Every thing relating to Jeremiah shews him to have been a man of an equivocal character. In his metaphor of the potter and clay, chap. xviii. he guards his prognostications in such a crafty manner, as always to leave himself a door to escape. by, in case the event should be contrary to what he had predicted.

In the 7th and 8th verses of that chapter, he makes the
Almighty

* In the 14th verse of the 7th chapter, it is said, that the child should be called Immanuel. But this name was not given to either of the children, otherwise than as a character which the word signifies. That of the prophetess was called Maher-shalal-hash-baz: and that of Mary was called Jesus.

Almighty to say, " At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down and destroy it ; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, *I will repent me of the evil that I thought to do unto them.*" Here was a proviso against one side of the case : now for the other side.

Verses 9 and 10. " At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it do evil in my sight that it obey not my voice, then *I will repent me of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them.*" Here is a proviso against the other side ; and according to this plan of prophesying, a prophet could never be wrong, however mistaken the Almighty might be. This sort of absurd subterfuge, and this manner of speaking of the Almighty, as one would speak of a man, is consistent with nothing but the stupidity of the bible.

As to the authenticity of the book, it is only necessary to read it, in order to decide positively, that though some passages recorded therein may have been spoken by Jeremiah, he is not the author of the book. The historical parts, if they can be called by that name, are in the most confused condition. The same events are several times repeated, and that in a manner different, and sometimes in contradiction to each other, and this disorder runs even to the last chapter, where the history, upon which the greater part of the book has been employed, begins a-new, and ends abruptly. The book has all the appearance of being a medley of unconnected anecdotes, respecting persons and things of that time, collected together in the same rude manner as if the various and contradictory accounts that are to be found in a bundle of news papers respecting persons and things of the present day, were put together without date, order, or explanation. I will give two or three examples of this kind.

It appears from the accounts of the 37th chapter, that the army of Nebuchadnezzar, who are called the army of the Chaldeans, had besieged Jerusalem sometime, and on their hearing that the army of Pharaoh of Egypt were marching

marching against them, they raised the siege and retreated for a time. It may here be proper to mention, in order to understand this confused history, that Nebuchadnezzar had besieged and taken Jerusalem during the reign of Jehoiakin, the predecessor of Zedachiah, and that it was Nebuchadnezzar, who had made Zedekiah king, or rather vice-roy; and that this second siege, of which the book of Jeremiah treats, was in consequence of the revolt of Zedekiah against Nebuchadnezzar. This will in some measure account for the suspicion that affixes itself to Jeremiah, being a traitor, and in the interest of Nebuchadnezzar, whom Jeremiah calls in the 43d chapter, ver. 10, the servant of God.

The 11th verse of this chapter (the 37th) says, “ And it came to pass, that, when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh’s army, that Jeremiah went fourth out of Jerusalem to go (as this account states) into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people. And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, *Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans.*” Then Jeremiah said, *it is false, I fall not away to the Chaldeans.*” Jeremiah being thus stopt and accused, was, after being examined, committed to prison on suspicion of being a traitor, where he remained, as is stated in the last verse of this chapter.

But the next chapter gives an account of the imprisonment of Jeremiah, which has no connection with *this* account, but ascribes his imprisonment to another circumstance, and for which he must go back to the 21st chapter. It is there stated, ver. 1, that Zedekiah sent Pashur, the son of Melchiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, to Jeremiah, to enquire of him concerning Nebuchadnezzar, whose army was then before Jerusalem; and Jeremiah said to them, ver. 8, “ Thus saith the Lord, Behold I set before you the way of life and the way of death. He that abideth in this city, shall die by the sword and by the famine, and by the pestilence, *but he that goeth out and fallest to the Chaldeans that besiege*”

“ you,

“you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey.”

This interview and conference breaks off abruptly at the end of the 10th verse of the 21st chapter; and such is the disorder of this book, that we have to pass over sixteen chapters upon various subjects, in order to come at the continuation and event of this conference; and this brings us to the first verse of the 38th chapter, as I have just mentioned.

The 38th chapter opens with saying, “Then Shephaniah the son of Mattan, and Gekaliah the son of Pashur, and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashur the son of Malchiah (here are more persons mentioned than in the 21st chapter) heard the words that Jeremiah spake unto the people saying, *Thus saith the Lord, he that remaineth in this city, shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence; but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live.*” which are the words of the conference) “Therefore (say they to Zedekiah) we beseech thee, let this man be put to death, for thus he weakeneth the hands of all the people in speaking such words unto them; for this man seeketh not the welfare of the people but the hurt;” and at the 6th verse it is said, “Then they took Jeremiah, and put him into the dungeon of Malchiah.”

These two accounts are different and contradictory. The one ascribes his imprisonment to his attempt to *escape out of the city*, the other to his *preaching and prophesying in the city*. The one to his being seized by the guard at the gate, the other to his being accused before Zedekiah by the conferees.*

In.

* I observed two chapters, 16th and 17th. in the 1st book of Samuel, that contradict each other with respect to David, and the manner he became acquainted with Saul, as the 37th and 38th chapter of the book of Jeremiah contradict each other with respect to the cause of Jeremiah's imprisonment.

In the 16th chapter of Samuel, it is said, that an evil spirit from God troubled Saul, and that his servants advised him (as a remedy) “to seek out a man who was a cunning player upon the harp:” & Saul said, ver. 17, “provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me.” Then answered one of his servants, and said, “Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty man, and a

In the next chapter (the 39th,) we have another instance of the disordered state of this book ; for notwithstanding the siege of the city by Nebuchadnezzar has been the subject of several of the proceeding chapters, particularly the 37th and 38th ; the 39th chapter begins as if not a word had been said upon the subject, and as if the reader was still to be informed of every particular respecting it ; for it begins with saying, ver. 1. *"In the ninth year of Zedekiah, king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and all his army, against Jerusalem, and besieged it,"* &c. &c.

But the instance in the last chapter (the 52d) is still more glaring : for though the story has now been told over and over again, this chapter still supposes the readers not to know any thing of it ; for it begins by saying, ver. 1. *"Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem : and his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnath. Ver. 4. And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it, and built forts against it,"* &c. &c.

"man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him : wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, send me David thy son. And (ver. 21) David came to Saul, and stood before him, and he loved him greatly, and he became his armour bearer ; and when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul (ver. 23.) David took his harp, and played with his hand, and Saul was refreshed and was well."

But the next chapter (17.) gives an account, all different to this, of the manner that Saul and David became acquainted. Here it is ascribed to David's encounter with Goliath, when David was sent by his father to carry provision to his brethren in the camp. In the 55th verse of this chapter, it is said, *"And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, (Goliath) he said to Abner the captain of the host, Abner, whose son is this youth ? And Abner said, as thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell. And the king said, enquire thou whose son the stripling is. And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with the head of the Philistine in his hand. And Saul said unto him, whose son art thou young man ? And David answered, I am the son of thy servant Jesse, the Bethlemite."* These two accounts belie each other, because each of them supposes Saul and David not to have known each other before. This book, the bible, is too ridiculous even for criticism.

It is not possible that any one man, and more particularly Jeremiah, could have been the writer of this book. The errors are such as could not have been committed by any person sitting down to compose a work. Were I or any other man to write in such disordered manner, nobody would read what was written, and every one would suppose that the writer was in a state of insanity. The only way therefore to account for the disorder is, that the book is a medley of detached unauthenticated anecdotes, put together by some stupid book-maker, under the name of Jeremiah, because many of them refer to him, and to the circumstances of the times he lived in.

Of the duplicity and of the false prediction of Jeremiah, I shall mention two instances, and then proceed to review the remainder of the bible.

It appears from the 38th chapter, that when Jeremiah was in prison, Zedekiah sent for him, and at this interview which was private, Jeremiah pressed it strongly on Zedekiah to surrender himself to the enemy. If, says he, *v. 17, Thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, &c.* Zedekiah was apprehensive that what passed at this conference should be known; and he said to Jeremiah, *ver. 25. "If the princes, (meaning those of Judah,) hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death, and also what the king said unto thee; than thou shalt say unto them, I present my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there. Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him, and he told them according to all the words the king had commanded."* Thus this man of God, as he is called, could tell a lie, or very strongly prevaricate, when he supposed it would answer his purpose; for certainly he did not go to Zedekiah to make this supplication, neither did he make it; he went because he was sent for; and he employed that opportunity to advise Zedekiah to surrender himself to Nebuchadnezzar.

In the 34th chapter is a prophecy of Jeremiah to Zedekiah in these words, *ver. 2. "Thus saith the Lord, Behold*

"I will

“ I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon
 “ and he will burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape
 “ out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken and delivered
 “ into his hand ; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the
 “ king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to
 “ mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon ; yet *hear the word*
 “ *of the Lord, O Zedekiah, king of Judah. Thus saith the Lord*
 “ *thou shalt not die by the sword ; but thou shalt die in peace, and*
 “ *with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings that were*
 “ *before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee ; and they will la-*
 “ *ment thee, saying, Ah, Lord !* FOR I HAVE PRONOUNCED
 “ THE WORD SAITH THE LORD.”

Now, instead of Zedekiah beholding the eyes of the king of Babylon, and speaking with him mouth to mouth, and dying in peace, and with the burning of odours, as at the funeral of his fathers (as Jeremiah had declared the Lord himself had pronounced) the reverse, according to the 52d chapter, was the case : it is there said, verse 10. “ *That the*
 “ *king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes ; then*
 “ *he put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in chains, and*
 “ *carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of*
 “ *his death.*” What then can we say of these prophets, but that they are impostors and liars ?

As for Jeremiah he experienced none of those evils. He was taken into favour by Nebuchadnezzar, who gave him in charge to the captain of the guard, chap xxxix, ver. 12. “ *Take him (said he) and look well to him, and do him*
 “ *no harm, but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee ;*” Jeremiah joined himself afterwards to Nebuchadnezzar, and went about prophesying for him against the Egyptians who had marched to the relief of Jerusalem while it was besieged. Thus much for another of the lying prophets, and the book that bears his name.

I have been the more particular in treating of the books ascribed to Isaiah and Jeremiah, because these two are spoken of in the books of Kings and of Chronicles, which the others are not. The remainder of the books, ascribed to the men called prophets, I shall not trouble myself much about, but take them collectively into the observations I shall offer on the character of the men styled prophets.

In

In the former part of the *Age of Reason* I have said, that the word prophet was the bible word for poet, and that the flights and metaphors of the Jewish poets, have been foolishly erected into what are now called prophecies. I am sufficiently justified in this opinion, not only because the books called the Prophecies are written in poetical language; but because there is no word in the bible, except it be the word prophet, that describes what we mean by a poet. I have also said that the word signified a performer upon musical instruments, of which I have given some instances; such as that of a company of prophets prophesying with psalteries, with tabrets, with pipes, with harps, &c. and that Saul prophesied with them. 1 Sam. chap. ix. ver. 5. It appears from this passage, and from other parts in the book of Samuel, that the word prophet was confined to signify poetry and music; for the person who was supposed to have a visionary insight into concealed things was not called a prophet but a *Se-er** 1 Sam. chap. x. ver. 9, and it was not till after the word *Seer*, went out of use (which most probably was when Saul banished those he called wizards) that the profession of the Seer, or the art of seeing, became incorporated into the word prophet.

According to the modern meaning of the word prophet and prophesying, it signifies foretelling events to a great distance of time; and it became necessary to the inventors of the gospel to give it this latitude of meaning, in order to apply or to stretch, what they call, the prophecies of the old testament, at the times of the new. But according to the old testament, the prophesying of the Seer, and afterwards of the Prophet, so far as the meaning of the word Seer was incorporated into that of Prophet, had reference only to things of the time then passing, or very closely connected with it; such as the event of a battle they were going to engage in, or of a journey, or of any enterprize they were going to undertake, or of any circumstance then pending, or of any difficulty they were then in, all of which had immediate references to themselves, (as in the case already mentioned

* I know not what is the Hebrew word that corresponds to the word *Seer* in English; but I observe it is translated into French by *le Voyant*, from the verb *voir*; to see, and which means the person who sees or the Se-er.

mentioned of Ahaz and Isaiah, with respect to the expression, *Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son,*) and not to any distant future time. It was that kind of prophesying that corresponds to what we call fortune telling, such as casting nativities, predicting riches, fortunate or unfortunate marriages, conjuring for lost goods, &c. and it is the fraud of the christian church, not that of the Jews, and the ignorance and superstition of modern, not that of ancient times, that have elevated those poetical-musical-conjuring-dreaming-strolling gentry, into the rank they have since had.

But besides this general character of all the prophets, they had also a particular character. They were in parties; and they prophesied for, or against, according to the party they were with, as the political and poetical writers of the present day write in defence of the party they associate with against the other.

After the Jews were divided into two nations, that of Judah and that of Israel, each party had its prophets who abused and accused each other of being false prophets, lying prophets, impostors, &c. The prophets of the party of Judah prophesied against the prophets of the party of Israel, and those of the party of Israel against those of Judah. This party-prophesying shewed itself immediately on the separation under the first two rival kings Rehoboam and Jeroboam. The prophet that cursed, or prophesied against, the altar that Jeroboam had built in Bethel was of the party of Judah where Rehoboam was king; and he was way-laid on his return home by a prophet of the party of Israel, who said unto him, (1 Kings, chap. x.) *Art thou the man of God that came from Judah?* and he said *I am*. Then the prophet of the party of Israel said to him, *I am a prophet also as thou art* (signifying of Judah) *and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, bring him back with thee unto thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water; but,* says the 18th verse, *he lieth unto him*. The event, however, according to the story, is, that the prophet of Judah never got back to Judah; for he was found dead on the road by the contrivance of the prophet of Israel, who no doubt was called

a true prophet by his own party, and the prophet of Judah a lying prophet.

In the 3d chapter of the 2d of Kings, a story is related of prophesying, or conjuring, that shews in several particulars the character of a prophet. Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and Joram, king of Israel, had, for a while, ceased their party animosity, and entered into an alliance; and those two, together with the king of Edom, engaged in a war against the king of Moab. After uniting and marching their armies, the story says, they were in great distress for water, upon which Jehoshaphat said, "*Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire of the Lord by him? And one of the servants of the king of Israel said, here is Elisha.* (Elisha was of the party of Judah) *and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah said, The word of the Lord is with him.*" The story then says, that these three kings went down to Elisha; and when Elisha (who, as I have said, was a Judahmite prophet) saw the king of Israel, he said unto him, "*What have I to do with thee, get thee to the prophets of thy father, and the prophets of thy mother.* Nay, but said the king of Israel, the Lord hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of the king of Moab," (meaning, because of the distress they were in for water.) Upon which Elisha said, "*As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, I would not look towards thee, nor see thee.*" Here is all the venom and vulgarity of a party prophet. We have now to see the performance or manner of prophesying.

Verse 15. "*Bring me,* said Elisha, *a minstrel.* And "*it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.*" Here is the farce of the conjurer. Now for the prophesy. "*And Elisha said,* (singing most probably to the tune he was playing,) "*Thus saith the Lord—make this valley full of ditches,*" which was just telling them what every countrymen could have told them, without either fiddle or farce, that the way to get water was to dig for it.

But as every conjurer is not famous alike for the same thing, so neither were those prophets; for though all of them, at least those I have spoken of, were famous for
lying,

lying, some of them excelled in cursing. Elisha, whom I have just mentioned, was a chief in this branch of prophesying. It was he that cursed the forty-two children in the name of the Lord, whom the two she-bears came and devoured. We are to suppose that those children were of the party of Israel. But as those who will curse will lye, there is just as much credit to be given to this story of Elisha's two she-bears, as there is to that of the dragon of Wantley, of whom it is said,

Poor children three, devoured he
That could not with him grapple;
And at one sup, he eat them up,
As a man would eat an apple.

THERE were another description of men called prophets, that amused themselves with dreams and visions but whether by night or by day we know not. These, if they were not quite harmless, were but little mischievous. Of this class are,

EZEKIEL and DANIEL; and the first question upon those books, as upon all the others, is, are they genuine? that is, were they written by Ezekiel and Daniel?

Of this there is no proof; but so far as my own opinion goes, I am more inclined to believe they were, than that they were not. My reasons for this opinion are as follow:

First, because those books do not contain internal evidence to prove that they were *not* written by Ezekiel and Daniel, as the books ascribed to Moses, Joshua, Samuel, etc. etc. prove they were not written by Moses, Joshua, Samuel, etc. etc.

Secondly, because they were not written till after the Babylonish captivity began; and there is good reason to believe, that not any book in the bible was written before that period; at least it is proveable, from the books themselves, as I have already shewn, that they were not written till after the commencement of the Jewish monarchy.

Thirdly, because the manner in which the books ascribed to Ezekiel and Daniel are written, agrees with the condition these men were in at the time of writing them.

Had the numerous commentators and priests who have foolishly

foolishly employed or wasted their time in pretending to expound and unriddle those books, been carried into captivity as Ezekiel and Daniel were, it would greatly have improved their intellects in comprehending the reason for this mode of writing; and have saved them the trouble of racking their invention, as they have done, to no purpose; for they would have found that themselves would be obliged to write, whatever they had to write, respecting their own affairs, or those of their friends, or of their country, in a concealed manner as those men have done.

These two books differ from all the rest; for it is only these that are filled with accounts of dreams and visions; and this difference arose from the situation the writers were in as prisoners of war or prisoners of state in a foreign country, which obliged them to convey even the most trifling information to each other, and all their political projects or opinions in obscure and metaphorical terms. They pretended to have dreamed dreams, and seen visions, because it was unsafe for them to speak facts or plain language. We ought however to suppose that the persons to whom they wrote understood what they meant, and that it was not intended any body else should. But these busy commentators and priests have been puzzling their wits to find out what it was not intended they should know, and with which they have nothing to do.

Ezekiel and Daniel were carried prisoners to Babylon, under the first captivity, in the time of Jehoiachim, nine years before the second captivity in the time of Zedekiah. The Jews were then still numerous, and had considerable force at Jerusalem; and as it is natural to suppose that men in the situation of Ezekiel and Daniel, would be meditating the recovery of their country and their own deliverance, it is reasonable to suppose, that the accounts of dreams and visions with which these books are filled, are no other than a disguised mode of correspondence to facilitate those objects. It served them as a cypher or secret alphabet. If they are not this, they are tales, reveries, and nonsense; or at least a fanciful way of wearing off the wearisomeness of captivity; but the presumption is they are the former.

Ezekiel begins his book by speaking of a vision of *cherubims*, and of a vision of a *wheel within a wheel*, which he says he saw by the river Chebar in the land of his captivity. Is it not reasonable to suppose that by the cherubims he meant the temple at Jerusalem, where they had figures of cherubims; and by a wheel within a wheel (which as a figure has always been understood to signify political contrivance) the project or means of recovering Jerusalem. In the latter part of his book he supposes himself transported to Jerusalem, and into the temple; and he refers back to the vision on the river Chebar, and says, chap. xliii. ver. 3, that this last vision was like the vision on the river Chebar; which indicates that those pretended dreams and visions had for their object the recovery of Jerusalem, and nothing further.

As to the romantic interpretations and applications, wild as the dreams and visions they undertake to explain, which commentators and priests have made of those books, that of converting them into things which they call prophecies, and making them bend to times and circumstances, as far remote even as the present day, it shews the fraud or the extreme folly to which credulity or priest-craft can go.

Scarcely any thing can be more absurd than to suppose that men situated as Ezekiel and Daniel were, whose country was over-run and in the possession of the enemy, all their friends and relations in captivity abroad or in slavery at home, or massacred, or in continual danger of it; scarcely any thing, I say, can be more absurd than to suppose, that such men should find nothing to do, but that of employing their time and their thoughts about what was to happen to other nations a thousand or two thousand years after they were dead: at the same time nothing more natural than that they should meditate the recovery of Jerusalem, and their own deliverance, and that this was the sole object of all the obscure and apparently frantic writing contained in those books.

In this sense, the mode of writing used in those two books, being forced by necessity, and not adopted by choice, is not irrational. But if we are to view the books as prophecies, they are false. In the 29th chapter of Ezekiel,

zekiel, speaking of Egypt, it is said verse 11, "No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it; *neither shall it be inhabited for forty years.*" This is what never came to pass, and consequently it is false as all the books I have already reviewed are. I here close this part of the subject.

In the former part of the *Age of Reason*, I have spoken of Jonah, and of the story of him and the whale. A fit story for ridicule, if it was written to be believed; or of laughter, if it was intended to try what credulity could swallow; for if it could swallow Jonah and the whale, it can swallow any thing.

But, as is already shewn in the observations on the book of Job and of Proverbs, it is not always certain which of the books in the bible are originally Hebrew, or only translations from books of the Gentiles into Hebrew; and as the book of Jonah, so far from treating of the affairs of the Jews, says nothing upon that subject, but treats altogether of the Gentiles, it is more probable that it is a book of the Gentiles than of the Jews; and that it has been written as a fable to expose the nonsense, and satyryze the vicious and malignant character of a bible prophet or a predicting priest.

Jonah is represented, first, as a disobedient prophet, running away from his mission, and taking shelter on board a vessel of the Gentiles bound from Joppa to Tarshish; as if he ignorantly supposed, by such a paltry contrivance, he could hide himself where God could not find him. The vessel is overtaken by a storm at sea, and the mariners, all of whom are Gentiles, believing it to be a judgment on account of some one on board who had committed a crime, agreed to cast lots to discover the offender, and the lot fell upon Jonah: But before this they had cast all their wares and merchandize over-board, to lighten the vessel while Jonah like a stupid fellow, was fast asleep in the hold.

After the lot had designated Jonah to be the offender, they questioned him to know who and what he was? and he told them *he was an Hebrew*; and, the story implies, that he confessed himself to be guilty. But these Gentiles, instead of sacrificing him at once, without pity or mercy, as
a company

a company of bible prophets or priests would have done by a Gentile in the same case, and as it is related Samuel had done by Agag, and Moses by the women and children, they endeavoured to save him, though at the risk of their own lives: for the account says, "*Nevertheless, (that is, though Jonah was a Jew and a foreigner, and the cause of all their misfortunes, and the loss of their cargo) 'the men' rowed hard to bring the boat to land, but they could not, for 'the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.'*" Still, however, they were unwilling to put the fate of the lot into execution, and they cried, says the account unto the Lord, saying, "*We beseech thee, O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood; for thou O Lord has done as it pleased thee.*" Meaning thereby, that they did not presume to judge Jonah guilty, since that he might be innocent, but that they considered the lot that had fallen upon him, as a decree of God, or as it *pleased God*. The address of this prayer shews that the Gentiles worshipped *one Supreme Being*, and that they were not idolators as the Jews represented them to be. But the storm still continuing, and the danger encreasing they put the fate of the lot into execution, and cast Jonah into the sea, where, according to the story, a great fish swallowed him whole and alive.

We have now to consider Jonah securely housed from the storm in the fish's belly. Here we are told that he prayed; but the prayer is a made up prayer, taken from various parts of the psalms, without connection or consistency, and adapted to the distress, but not at all to the condition, that Jonah was in. It is such a prayer as a Gentile, who might know something of the Psalms, could copy out for him. This circumstance alone, were there no other, is sufficient to indicate that the whole is a made up story. The prayer however is supposed to have answered the purpose, and the story goes on, (taking off at the same time the cant language of a bible prophet) saying, "*The Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon dry land.*"

Jonah then receives a second mission to Nineveh, with which he sets out, and we have now to consider him as a preacher. The distress he is represented to have suffered, the remembrance of his own disobedience as the cause of it, and

and the miraculous escape he is supposed to have had, were sufficient, one would conceive, to have impressed him with sympathy and benevolence in the execution of his mission: but instead of this, he enters the city with denunciation and malediction in his mouth, crying—*“ Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”*

We have now to consider this supposed missionary in the last act of his mission; and here it is that the malevolent spirit of a bible prophet, or of a predicting priest, appears in all that blackness of character that men ascribe to the being they call the Devil.

Having published his prediction, he withdrew says the story, to the east side of the city. But for what? Not to contemplate in retirement the mercy of his Creator to himself or to others, but to wait with malignant impatience the destruction of Nineveh. It came to pass, however, as the story relates, that the Ninevites reformed, and that God, according to the bible phrase, repented him of the evil he had said he would do unto them, and did it not. This, saith the first verse of the last chapter, *displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.* His obdurate heart would rather that all Nineveh should be destroyed, and every soul, young and old, perish in its ruins, than that his prediction should not be fulfilled. To expose the character of a prophet still more, a gourd is made to grow up in the night that promises him an agreeable shelter from the heat of the sun, in the place to which he is retired, and the next morning it dies. Here the rage of the prophet becomes excessive, and he is ready to destroy himself. *“ It is better said he for me to die than to live.”* This brings on a supposed expostulation between the Almighty and the prophet, in which the former says, *“ Dost thou well to be angry for the gourd? And Jonah said I do well to be angry even unto death. Then said the Lord, thou hast had pity on the gourd for which thou hast not laboured, neither made it to grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night, and should not I spare Nineveh that great city in which are more than three score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left.”*

Here is both the winding up of the satire and the moral of the fable. As a satire it strikes against the character

character of *all the bible prophets*, and against all the indiscriminate judgments upon men, women and children, with which this lying book, the bible is crowded; such as Noah's flood; the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the extirpation of the Canaanites even to sucking infants and women with child; because the same reflection, *that there are more than threescore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left*, meaning young children, apply to all the cases. It satyrizes also the supposed partiality of the Creator for one nation more than for another.

As a moral, it preaches against the malevolent spirit of prediction; for as certainly as a man predicts ill he becomes inclined to wish it. The pride of having his judgment right hardens his heart, till at last, he beholds with satisfaction, or sees with disappointment, the accomplishment or the failure of his predictions.—This book ends with the same kind of strong and well directed point against prophets, prophecies, and indiscriminate judgments, as the chapter that Benjamin Franklin made for the bible, about Abraham and the stranger, ends against the intolerant spirit of religious persecution. Thus much for the book of Jonah.

Of the poetical parts of the bible, that are called prophecies, I have spoken in the former part of the *Age of Reason*, and already in this; where I have said that the word *Prophet* is the bible word for *poet*; and that the flights and metaphors of those poets, many of which are become obscure by the lapse of time, and the change of circumstances, have been ridiculously erected into things called prophecies, and applied to purposes the writer never thought of. When a priest quotes any of those passages, he unriddles it agreeably to his own view, and imposes that explanation upon his congregation as the meaning of the writer. The *whore of Babylon* has been the common whore of all the priests, and each has accused the other of keeping the strumpet. So well do they agree in their explanations.

There now remains only a few books, which they call the books of the *lesser* prophets; and as I have already shewn that the *greater* are imposters, it would be cowardice

to disturb the repose of the little ones. Let them sleep then in the arms of their nurses the priests, and both be forgotten together.

I have now gone through the bible as a man would go through a wood with an axe on his shoulder, and fell trees. Here they lie, and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never make them grow,—I pass on to the book of the New Testament.

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THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THE NEW TESTAMENT they tell us is founded upon the prophecies of the Old ; if so, it must follow the fate of its foundation.

As it is nothing extraordinary that a woman should be with child before she is married, and that the son she might bring forth should be executed even unjustly, I see no reason for not believing that such a woman as Mary, and such a man as Joseph, and Jesus, existed. Their mere existence is a matter of indifference, about which there is no ground either to believe or to disbelieve, and which comes under the common head of, "*It may be so,*" and what then ? The probability, however, is, that there were such persons, or at least such as resembled them in part of the circumstances, because almost all romantic stories have been suggested by some actual circumstance ; as the adventures of Robinson Crusoe, not a word of which is true, was suggested by the case of Alexander Selkirk.

It is not then the existence or the non-existence of the persons that I trouble myself about. It is the fable of Jesus Christ, as told in the New Testament, and the wild and visionary doctrine raised thereon, against which I contend. The story taking it as it is told, is blasphemously obscene. It gives an account of a young woman engaged to be married, and while under this engagement, she is, to speak plain language, debauched by a ghost, under the impeous pretense (Luke chap. i, ver. 35) that "*the holy ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee.*" Notwithstanding which, Joseph afterwards marries her, cohabits with her as his wife, and in his turn rivals the ghost. This is putting the story
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into intelligible language, and when told in this manner, there is not a priest but must be ashamed to own it.*

Obscenity in matters of faith, however rapped up, is always a token of fable and imposture; for it is necessary to our serious belief in God, that we do not connect it with stories, that run as this does, into ludicrous interpretations. This story is, upon the face of it; the same kind of story as that of Jupiter and Leda, or Jupiter and Europa, or any of the amorous adventures of Jupiter; and shews, as is already stated in the former part of the *Age of Reason*, that the Christian faith is built upon the heathen mythology.

As the historical parts of the New Testament, so far as concern Jesus Christ, are confined to a very short space of time, less than two years, and all within the same country, and nearly to the same spot, the discordance of time, place, and circumstance, which detect the fallacy of the books of the Old Testament, and proves them to be impostitions, cannot be expected to be found here in the same abundance. The New Testament, compared with the old is like a farce of one act, in which there is not room for very numerous violations of the unities. There are, however, some glaring contradictions, which exclusive of the fallacy of the pretended prophecies, are sufficient to shew the story of Jesus Christ to be false.

I lay it down as a position which cannot be controverted; First, that the *agreement* of all the parts of a story does not prove that story to be true, because the parts may agree and the whole maybe false: Secondly, that the *disagreement* of the parts of a story prove the *whole cannot be true*. The agreements does not prove true, but the disagreement proves falshood positively.

The history of Jesus Christ is contained in the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The first chapter of Matthew begins with giving a genealogy of Jesus Christ; and in the third chapter of Luke, there is also given a genealogy of Jesus Christ. Did these two agree, it would not prove the genealogy to be true, because
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* Many, the supposed virgin mother of Jesus, had several other children, sons, and daughters. See Matth. chap. xiii. ver. 55, 56.

it might nevertheless be a fabrication ; but as they contradict each other in every particular, it proves falshood absolutely. If Matthew speak truth, Luke speaks falshood ; and if Luke speak truth, Matthew speaks falshood ; and as there is no authority for believing one more than the other, there is no authority for believing either ; and if they cannot be believed, even in the very first thing they say, and set out to prove, they are not entitled to be believed, in any thing they say afterwards. Truth is an uniform thing ; and as to inspiration and revelation, were we to admit it, it is impossible to suppose it can be contradictory. Either then the men called apostles were imposters, or the books ascribed to them have been written by other persons and fathered upon them, as is the case in the old testament.

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW gives, chap. i. ver. 6, a genealogy by name from David, up, thro' Joseph the husband of Mary to Christ, and makes there to be *twenty-eight* generations. The book of Luke gives also a genealogy by name from Christ, through Joseph the husband of Mary, down to David, and makes there to be *forty-three* generations. Besides which there is only two names of David and Joseph that are alike in the two lists. I here insert both genealogical lists, and for the sake of perspicuity and comparison, have placed them both in the same direction, that is, from Joseph down to David.

Genealogy according to Matthew

- Christ
- 2 Joseph
- 3 Jacob
- 4 Matthan
- 5 Eleazer
- 6 Eliud
- 7 Achim
- 8 Sadoc
- 9 Azor
- 10 Eliakim
- 11 Abiud
- 12 Zerobabel
- 13 Salathiel

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Genealogy according to Luke.

- Christ
- 2 Joseph
- 3 Heli
- 4 Matthat
- 5 Levi
- 6 Melchi
- 7 Janna
- 8 Joseph
- 9 Mattathias
- 10 Amos
- 11 Naum
- 12 Esi
- 13 Nagge

14 Jechonias

14 Jechonias
 15 Josias
 16 Amon
 17 Manasses
 18 Ezekias
 19 Achaz
 20 Joatham
 21 Ozias
 22 Joram
 23 Josaphat
 24 Afa
 25 Abia
 26 Roboam
 27 Solomon
 28 David.*

* From the birth of David to the birth of Christ is upwards of 1080 years, and as the life-time of Christ is not included, there is but 27 full generations. To find therefore the average age of each person mentioned in the list at the time his first son was born, it is only necessary to divide 1080 by 27, which gives 40 years for each person. As the life-time of man was then but of the same extent it is now, it is an absurdity to suppose that 27 following generations should all be old bachelors before they married : and the more so, when we are told, that Solomon, the next in succession to David, had a house-full of wives and mistresses before he was twenty-one years of age. So far from this genealogy being a solemn truth, it is not even a reasonable lie. The list of Luke gives about twenty-six years for the average age, and this is too much.

14 Maath
 15 Mattathias
 16 Semei
 17 Joseph
 18 Juda
 19 Joanna
 20 Rhesa
 21 Zorobabel
 22 Salathiel
 23 Neri
 24 Melchi
 25 Addi
 26 Cosam
 27 Elmodam
 28 Er
 29 Jose
 30 Eliezer
 31 Jorim
 32 Matthat
 33 Levi
 34 Simeon
 35 Juda
 36 Joseph
 37 Jonan
 38 Eliakim
 39 Melea
 40 Menan
 41 Mattatha
 42 Nathan
 43 David.

Now if these men, Matthew and Luke, set out with a falshood between them (as these two accounts shew they do) in the very commencement of their history of Jesus Christ, and of who, and of what he was, what authority (as I have before asked) is there left for believing the strange things they tell us afterwards? If they cannot be believed in their account of his natural genealogy, how are we to believe them when they tell us he was the son of God, begotten by a ghost, and that an angel announced this in secret to his mother? If they lied in one genealogy why are we to believe them in the other? If his natural genealogy be manufactured, which it certainly is, why are we not to suppose, that his celestial genealogy is manufactured also; and that the whole is fabulous? Can any man of serious reflection hazard his future happiness upon the belief of a story, naturally impossible, repugnant to every idea of decency, and related by persons already detected of falshood? Is it not more safe that we stop ourselves at the plain, pure, and unmixed belief of one God, which is Deism, than that we commit ourselves on an ocean of improbable, irrational, indecent and contradictory tales?

The first question, however, upon the books of the new testament, as upon those of the old, is, are they genuine? were they written by the persons to whom they are ascribed? for it is upon this ground only that the strange things related therein have been credited. Upon this point there is no *direct* proof for or against; and all that this state of a case proves, is *doubtfulness*, and doubtfulness is the opposite of belief. The state, therefore that the books are in prove against themselves as far as this kind of proof can go.

But exclusive of this, the presumption is, that the books called the evangelists, and ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, were not written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and that they are impositions. The disordered state of the history in these four books, the silence of one book upon matters related in the other, and the disagreement that is to be found among them, implies that they are the production of some unconnected individuals, many years after the things they pretend to relate, each of whom

whom made his own legend ; and not the writings of men living intimately together, as the men called apostles are supposed to have done. In fine, that they have been manufactured as the books of the old testament have been by other persons than those whose names they bear.

The story of the angel announcing what the church calls the *immaculate conception*, is not so much as mentioned in the books ascribed to Mark and John, and is differently related in Matthew and Luke. The former says the angel appeared to Joseph ; the latter says it was to Mary ; but either Joseph or Mary was the worst evidence that could have been thought of ; for it was others that should have testified *for them*, and not they for themselves. Were any girl, that is now with child to say, and even to swear it, that she was gotten with child by a ghost, and that an angel told her so, would she be believed ? Certainly she would not. Why then are we to believe the same thing of another girl whom we never saw, told by nobody knows who, nor when, nor where. How strange and inconsistent is it, that the same circumstances that would weaken the belief even of a probable story, should be given as a motive for believing this one that has, upon the face of it, every token of absolute impossibility and imposture ?

The story of Herod destroying all the children under two years old, belongs altogether unto the writer of the book of Matthew ; not one of the rest mentions any thing about it. Had such a circumstance been true, the universality of it must have made it known to all the writers, and the thing would have been too striking to have been omitted by any. This writer tells us that Jesus escaped this slaughter, because Joseph and Mary were warned by an angel to flee with him into Egypt ; but he forgot to make provision for John, who was then under two years of age. John, however, who staid behind, fared as well as Jesus who fled ; and therefore the story circumstantially belies itself.

Not any two of those writers agree in reciting *exactly in the same words*, the written inscription, short as it is, which they tell us was put over Christ when he was crucified ; and besides this, Mark says he was crucified at the third
hour

hour (nine in the morning) and John says it was at the sixth hour, twelve at noon.*

The inscription is thus stated in those books.

Matthew - - This is Jesus the king of the Jews.

Mark - - - - The king of the Jews.

Luke - - - This is the king of the Jews.

John - - Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews.

We may infer from these circumstances, trivial as they are, that those writers, whoever they were, and in whatever time they lived, were not present at the scene. The only one of the men called apostles, who appears to have been near to the spot, was Peter, and when he was accused of being one of Jesus' followers, it is said, (Matt. chap. xxvi. ver. 74) "then Peter began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man." Yet we are now called upon to believe this same Peter, convicted by their own account of perjury. For what reason or on what authority should we do this?

The accounts that are given of the circumstances that they tell us attended the crucifixion, are differently related in those four books.

The book ascribed to Matthew says, *there was darkness over all the land, from the sixth hour unto the ninth hour—that the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom—that there was an earthquake—that the rocks rent—that the graves opened—that the bodies of many of the saints that slept, arose and came out of their graves after the resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.* Such is the account which this dashing writer of the book of Matthew gives, but in which he is not supported by the writers of the other books.

The writer of the book ascribed to Mark, in detailing the circumstances of the crucifixion, makes no mention of any earthquake, nor of the rocks rending, nor of the graves opening, nor of the dead men walking out. The writer of the book of Luke is silent also upon the same points. And as to the writer of the book of John, though he

* According to John, the sentence was *not passed* till about the sixth hour (noon) and consequently the execution could not be till the afternoon. But Mark says expressly, that he was *crucified* at the third hour. Nine in the morning, chap xv, ver. 25. John, chap. xix, ver. 14.

he details all the circumstances of the crucifixion down to the burial of Christ, he says nothing about either the darkness—the veil of the temple—the earthquake—the rocks—the graves, nor the dead men.

Now if it had been true that these things had happened, and if the writers of these books had lived at the time they *did* happen, and had been the persons they are said to be, namely, the four men called apostles, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, it was not possible for them, as true historians, even without the aid of inspiration, not to have recorded them. The things, supposing them to have been facts, were of too much notoriety not to have been known and of too much importance not to have been told. All these supposed apostles must have been witnesses of the earthquake, if there had been any ; for it was not possible for them to have been absent from it. — The opening of the graves and the resurrection of the dead men, and their walking about the city, is of still greater importance than the earthquake. An earthquake is always possible and natural, and proves nothing ; but this opening of the graves is supernatural and directly in point to their doctrine, their cause, and their apostleship. Had it been true, it would have filled up whole chapters of those books, and been the chosen theme, and general chorus of all the writers ; but instead of this, little and trivial things, and mere prating conversations of, *he said this* and *she said that*, are often tediously detailed, while this most important of all, had it been true, is passed off in a slovenly manner, by a single dash of the pen, and that by one writer only, and not so much as hinted at by the rest.

It is an easy thing to tell a lie, but it is difficult to support the lie after it is told. The writer of the book of Matthew should have told us who the saints were that came to life again and went into the city, and what became of them afterwards, and who it was that saw them ; for he is not hardy enough to say that he saw them himself—whether they came out naked and all in natural buff, he-saints, and she-saints, or whether they came full dressed, and where they got their dresses—whether they went to their former habitations and reclaimed their wives, their husbands, and their property, and how they were received

ceived—whether they entered ejections for the recovery of their possessions, or brought actions of *crim. con.* against the rival interlopers—whether they remained on earth, and followed their former occupations of preaching or working, or whether they died again, or went back to their graves again alive, and buried themselves.

Strange indeed that an army of saints should return to life, and nobody know who they were, nor who it was that saw them, and that not a word more should be said upon the subject, nor these saints have any thing to tell us! Had it been the prophets who (as we are told) had formerly prophesied of these things, *they* must have had a great deal to say. They could have told us every thing; and we should have had posthumous prophecies, with notes and commentaries upon the first, a little better, at least, than we have now. Had it been Moses and Aaron, and Joshua and Samuel and David, not an unconverted Jew had remained in all Jerusalem. Had it been John the Baptist, and the saints of the times then present, every body would have known them, and they would have out-preached and out-famed all the other apostles. But instead of this, these saints are made to pop up like Jonah's goad in the night, for no purpose at all but to wither in the morning. Thus much for this part of the story.

THE tale of the Resurrection follows that of the crucifixion; and in this, as well as in that, the writers, whoever they were, disagree so much as to make it evident that none of them were there.

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW states, that when Christ was put in the sepulcher, the Jews applied to Pilate for a watch or a guard to be placed over the sepulchre to prevent the body being stolen by the disciples, and that in consequence of this request, the sepulchre was *made sure, sealing the stone*, that covered the mouth *and setting a watch*. But the other books say nothing about this application, nor about the sealing, nor the guard, nor the watch: and according to their accounts there were none. Matthew, however, follows up this part of the story of the guard or the watch, with a second part, that I shall notice in the conclusion, as it serves to detect the fallacy of those books.

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW continues its account and
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says, (chap. xxviii, v. 1,) that at the end of the sabbath as it began to *dawn*, towards the first day of the week came *Mary Magdalene* and the *other Mary* to see the sepulchre. —Mark says it was *sun rising*, and John says it was *dark*. Luke says it was *Mary Magdalene* and *Joanna*, and *Mary the mother* of James, and *other women* that came to the sepulchre; and John states that *Mary Magdalene* came alone. So well do they agree about the first evidences! They all, however, appear to have known most about *Mary Magdalene*; she was a woman of a large acquaintance; and it was not an ill conjecture that she might be upon the stroll.

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW goes on to say—(ver. 2.) And behold there was a great earthquake, for the Angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door and *sat upon it*. But the other books say nothing about the earthquake, nor about the angel rolling back the stone and *sitting upon it*; and according to their accounts there was no angel *sitting there*. Mark says the angel was *within the sepulchre sitting* on the right side. Luke says there were *two* and they were both *standing up*; and John says they were both *sitting down*, *one at the head and the other at the feet*.

Matthew says, that the angel that was *sitting upon the stone on the outside* of the sepulchre, told the two *Maries* that Christ was risen, and that the women went away *quickly*. Mark says that the women, upon seeing the stone rolled away and wondering at it, went *into the sepulchre*, and that it was the angel that was *sitting within* on the right side that told them so. Luke says it was the two angels that were standing up, and John says it was Jesus Christ himself that told it to *Mary Magdalene*, and that she did not go into the sepulchre, but only stooped down and looked in.

Now if the writers of these four books had gone into a court of justice to prove an *alibi*, (for it is of the nature of an *alibi* that is here attempted to be proved, namely, the absence of a dead body by supernatural means) and had they given their evidence in the same contradictory manner as it is here given, they would have been in danger of having their ears cropt for perjury, and would have

justly

justly deserved it. Yet this is the evidence, and these are the books, that have been imposed upon the world as being given by divine inspiration, and as the unchangeable word of God.

The writer of the book of Matthew, after giving this account, relates a story that is not to be found in any of the other books, and which is the same I have just before alluded to.

"Now, says he, (that is after the conversation the women had had with the angel sitting upon the stone) behold some of the watch (meaning the watch that he had said had been placed over the sepulchre) came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done, and when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken council, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, say ye, that his disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept; and if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and secure you. So they took the money and did as they were taught. And this saying (that his disciples stole him away) is commonly reported among the Jews *until this day.*"

The expression, *until this day*, is an evidence that the book ascribed to Matthew, was not written by Matthew; and that it has been manufactured long after the times and things of which it pretends to treat; for the expression implies a great length of intervening time. It would be inconsistent in us to speak in this manner of any thing happening in our own time. To give therefore intelligible meaning to the expression, we must suppose a lapse of some generations at least; for this manner of speaking carries the mind back to an ancient time.

The absurdity also of the story is worth noticing; for it shews the writer of the book of Matthew to have been an exceeding weak and foolish man. He tells a story that contradicts itself in point of possibility; for though the guard, if there were any, might be made to say, that the body was taken away while they were *asleep*; and to give that as a reason for their not having prevented it, that same sleep must also have prevented their knowing how, and by whom it was done; and yet they are made to say

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that it was the disciples who did it. Were a man to tender his evidence of something that he should say was done, and of the manner of doing it, and of the persons who did it, while he was asleep, and could know nothing of the matter, such evidence could not be received. It will do well enough for testament evidence, but not for any thing where truth is concerned.

I come now to that part of the evidence in those books that respects the pretended appearance of Christ after this pretended resurrection.

The writer of the book of Matthew relates, that the angel that was sitting on the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre, said to the two Maries, chap. xxviii, ver. 7. "*Behold Christ is gone before you into Galilee, there ye shall see him ; lo, I have told you*." And the same writer, at the two next verses (8. 9) makes Christ himself to speak to the same purpose to these women, immediately after the angel had told it to them, and that they *ran quickly* to tell it to the disciples. And at the 16th verse it is said, "*Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them ; and when they saw him, they worshipped him.*"

But the writer of the book of John tells a story very different to this ; for he says. chap. xx, ver, 19. "*Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, (that is, the same day that Christ is said to have risen) when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews came Jesus and stood in the midst of them.*"

According to Matthew, the eleven were marching to Galilee, to meet Jesus in a mountain by his own appointment, at the very time, when, according to John, they were assembled in another place ; and that not by appointment, but in secret for fear of the Jews.

The writer of the book of Luke contradicts that of Matthew more pointedly than John does ; for he says expressly that the meeting was *in Jerusalem*, the evening of the same day, that he, Christ, rose, and that the *eleven* were *there*. See Luke, chap. xxiv. verses 13, 33.

Now it is not possible (unless we admit these supposed disciples the right of wilful lying) that the writers of these

these books could be any of the eleven persons called disciples. For if, according to Matthew, the eleven went into Galilee to meet Jesus in a mountain by his own appointment on the same day that he is said to have risen, Luke and John must have been two of that eleven; yet the writer of Luke says, expressly, and John implies as much, that the meeting was that same day in a house in Jerusalem. And on the other hand, if, according to Luke and John, the *eleven* were assembled in a house in Jerusalem, Matthew must have been one of that eleven, yet Matthew says, the meeting was in a mountain in Galilee, and consequently the evidence given in those books destroy each other.

The writer of the book of Mark says nothing about any meeting in Galilee; but he says, chap. xvi. ver. 12. that Christ, after his resurrection, appeared in *another form* to two of them, as they walked into the country; and that these two told it to the residue who would not believe them. Luke also tells a story, in which he keeps Christ employed the whole of the day of this pretended resurrection, until the evening, and which totally invalidates the account of going to the mountain in Galilee. He says that two of them, without saying which two, went that *same day* to a village called Emmaus, threescore furlongs (seven miles and an half) from Jerusalem, and that Christ, in disguise, went with them and staid with them unto the evening, and supped with them, and then vanished out of their sight, and re-appeared that same evening at the meeting of the eleven in Jerusalem.

This is the contradictory manner in which the evidence of this pretended re-appearance of Christ is stated. The only point in which the writers agree is the skulking privacy of that re-appearance; for whether it was in the recesses of a mountain in Galilee, or in a shut-up house in Jerusalem, it was still skulking. To what cause then are we to assign this skulking? On the one hand it is directly repugnant to the supposed or pretended end, that of convincing the world that Christ was risen; and on the other hand to have asserted the publicity of it would have exposed the writers of those books to public detection; and therefore they have been under the necessity of making it a private affair.

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As to the account of Christ being seen by more than five hundred at once, it is Paul only who says it, and not the five hundred who say it for themselves. It is therefore the testimony of but one man, and that too of a man who did not, according to the same account, believe a word of the matter himself at the time it is said to have happened. His evidence, supposing him to have been the writer of the 15th chapter of Corinthians, where this account is given, is like that of a man who comes into a court of justice to swear that what he had sworn before was false. A man may often see reason, and he has too always the right, of changing his *opinion*, but this liberty does not extend to matters of fact.

I now come to the last scene, that of the ascension into heaven. Here all fear of the Jews, and of every thing else, must necessarily have been out of the question. It was that which, if true, was to seal the whole, and upon which the reality of the future mission of the disciples was to rest for proof. Words, whether declarations or promises, that passed in private, either in the recess of a mountain in Galilee, or in a shut-up house in Jerusalem, even supposing them to have been spoken, could not be evidence in public. It was therefore necessary that this last scene should preclude the possibility of denial and dispute, and that it should be, as I have stated in the former part of the *Age of Reason*, as public and as visible as the sun at noon-day; at least, it ought to have been as public as the crucifixion is reported to have been. But to come to the point——

In the first place, the writer of the book of Matthew does not say a syllable about it; neither does the writer of the book of John. This being the case, is it possible to suppose that those writers, who affect to be even minute in other matters, would have been silent upon this, had it been true? The writer of the book of Mark passes it off in a careless slovenly manner, with a single dash of the pen, as if he was tired of romancing, or ashamed of the story; so also does the writer of Luke; and even between these two there is not an apparent agreement as to the place where this final parting is said to have been.

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THE BOOK OF MARK says, that Christ appeared to the eleven as they sat at meat, alluding to the meeting of the eleven at Jerusalem; he then states the conversation that he says passed at that meeting; and immediately after says (as a school-boy would finish a dull story.) “So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.” But the writer of Luke says, that the ascension was from Bethany; that he, Christ, *led them out as far as Bethany, and was parted from them there, and was carried up into heaven.*—So also was Mahomet; and as to Moses, the apostle Jude says, ver. 9, *that Michael and the devil disputed about his body.* While we believe such fables as these, or either of them, we believe unworthily of the Almighty.

I have now gone through the examination of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John: and when it is considered that the whole space of time, from the crucifixion to what is called the ascension, is but a few days, apparently not more than three or four, and that all the circumstances are reported to have happened nearly about the same spot, Jerusalem, it is, I believe, impossible to find, in any story upon record, so many and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods, as are in those books. They are more numerous and striking than I had any expectation of finding when I began this examination, and far more so than I had any idea of when I wrote the former part of the *Age of Reason*. I had then neither bible nor testament to refer to, nor could I procure any. My own situation, even as to existence, was becoming every day more precarious; and as I was willing to leave something behind me upon the subject, I was obliged to be quick and concise. The quotations I then made were from memory only, but they are correct; and the opinions I have advanced in that work, are the effect of the most clear, and long established conviction, that the bible and the testament are impositions upon the world—that the fall of man—the account of Jesus Christ being the son of God—and of his dying to appease the wrath of God—and of salvation by that strange means, are all fabulous inventions dishonourable to the wisdom and power of the Almighty—that the only true religion is deism, by which I then meant and now mean the belief

of one God, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what are called moral virtues—and that it was upon this only (so far as religion is concerned) that I rested all my hopes of happiness hereafter. So say I now—and so help me God.

But to return to the subject.—Though it is impossible, at this distance of time to ascertain as a fact who were the writers of those four books (and this alone is sufficient to hold them in doubt, and where we doubt we do not believe) it is not difficult to ascertain negatively, that they were not written by the persons to whom they are ascribed. The contradictions in those books demonstrate two things.

First, That the writers cannot have been eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses of the matters they relate, or they would have related them without those contradictions; and consequently that the books have not been written by the persons called apostles, who are supposed to have been witnesses of this kind.

Secondly, That the writers, whoever they were, have not acted in concerted imposition; but each writer separately and individually for himself, and without the knowledge of the other.

The same evidence that applies to prove the one, applies equally to prove both those cases, that is, that the books were not written by the men called apostles, and also that they are not a concerted imposition. As to inspiration it is altogether out of the question. We may as well attempt to unite truth and falsehood as inspiration and contradiction.

If four men are eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses to a scene, they will, without any concert between them, agree as to the time and place when and where that scene happened. Their individual knowledge of the thing, each one knowing it for himself, renders concert totally unnecessary the one will not say it was in a mountain in the country, and the other, at a house in town. The one will not say it was sunrise, and the other that it was dark; for in whatever place it was, and at whatever time it was, they know it equally alike.

And on the other hand, if four men concert a story, they will make their separate relations of that story agree and corroborate with each other to support the whole. *That*

concert supplies the want of fact in the one case, as the knowledge of the fact supercedes, in the other case, the necessity of concert. The same contradictions therefore that prove there has been no concert, prove also that the reporters had not knowledge of the fact; (or rather of that which they relate as a fact;) and detect also the falsehood of their reports. Those books, therefore, have neither been written by the men called apostles, nor by imposters in concert. How then have they been written?

I am not one of those who are fond of believing there is much of that which is called wilful lying, or lying originally, except in the case of men setting up to be prophets, as in the old testament, for prophesying is lying professionally. In almost all other cases it is not difficult to discover the progress by which even simple supposition with the aid of credulity will in time grow into a lye, and at last be told as a fact: and whenever we can find a charitable reason for a thing of this kind we ought not to indulge a severe one.

That story of Jesus Christ appearing after he was dead is the story of an apparition; such as timid imaginations can always create in vision and credulity believe. Stories of this kind had been told of the assassination of Julius Cæsar not many years before, and they generally have their origin in violent deaths, or in execution of innocent persons. In cases of this kind, compassion lends its aid and benevolently stretches the story. It goes on a little and a little farther, till it becomes a *most certain truth*. Once start a ghost and credulity fills up the history of its life, and assigns the cause of its appearance. One tells it one way, another another way, till there is as many stories about the ghost, and about the proprietor of the ghost, as there are about Jesus Christ in these four books.

The story of the appearance of Jesus Christ is told with that strange mixture of the natural and the impossible that distinguishes legendary tale from fact. He is represented as suddenly coming in and going out when the doors are shut, and of vanishing out of sight, and appearing again, as one would conceive of an unsubstantial vision; then again he is hungry, sits down to meat, and eats his supper. But as those who tell stories of this kind never provide for all the cases, so it is here. They have told us

that when he arose he left his grave cloaths behind him, but they have forgotten to provide other cloths for him to appear in afterwards; or to tell us what he did with them when he ascended. Whether he stripped all off, or went up cloaths and all. In the case of Elijah, they have been careful enough to make him throw down his mantle. How it happened not to be burnt in the chariot of fire, *they* also have not told us. But as imagination supplies all deficiencies of this kind, we may suppose, if we please, that it was made of Salamander's wool.

Those who are not much acquainted with ecclesiastical history may suppose, that the book called the new testament has existed ever since the time of Jesus Christ, as they suppose that the books ascribed to Moses have existed ever since the time of Moses. But the fact is historically otherwise. There was no such book as the new testament till more than three hundred years after the time that Christ is said to have lived.

At what time the books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, began to appear is altogether a matter of uncertainty. There is not the least shadow of evidence of who the persons were that wrote them, nor at what time they were written; and they might as well have been called by the names of any of the other supposed apostles as by the names they are now called. The originals are not in the possession of any Christian church existing, any more than the two tables of stone written on, they pretend, by the finger of God upon mount Sinai and given to Moses, are in the possession of the Jews; and even if they were, there is no possibility of proving the hand writing in either case. At the time those four books were written there was no printing, and consequently there could be no publication otherwise than by written copies, which any man might make or alter at pleasure, and call them originals. Can we suppose it is consistent with the wisdom of the Almighty to commit himself and his will to man upon such precarious means as these, or that it is consistent we should pin our faith upon such uncertainties? We cannot make, nor alter, nor even imitate, so much as a blade of grass that he has made, and yet we can make or alter *words of God*, as easily as words of man.*

* The former part of the *Age of Reason* has not been published two

About three hundred and fifty years after the time that Christ is said to have lived, several writings of the kind I am speaking of were scattered in the hands of divers individuals, and as the church had began to form itself into a hierarchy or church government with temporal powers, it set itself about collecting them into a code as we now see them, called, the *New Testament*. They decided by vote, as I have before said, in the former part of the *Age of Reason*, which of those writings out of the collection they had made, should be the *word of God*, and which should not. The rabbins of the Jews had decided, by vote, upon the books of the bible before.

As the object of the church, as is the case in all national establishment of churches, was power and revenue, and terror the means it used, it is consistent to suppose that the most miraculous & wonderful of the writings they had collected, stood the best chance of being voted; and as to the authenticity of the books the *vote stands in the place of it*; for it can be traced no higher.

Disputes, however, ran high among the people then calling themselves Christians, not only as to points of doctrine, but as to the authenticity of the books. In the contest between the person called Saint Augustine and Fauste, about the year 400, the latter says, "The books called the evangelists have been composed long after the time of the apostles by some obscure men, who fearing that the world would not give credit to their relation of matters, of which they could not be informed, have published them under the names of the apostles; and which are so full of sottishness and discordant relations, that there is neither agreement nor connection between them."

years, and there is already an expression in it that is not mine. The expression is, *The book of Luke was carried by a majority of one vote only*. It may be true, but it is not I that have said it. Some person who might know of that circumstance has added it in a note at the bottom of the page of some of the editions printed either in England or in America, and the printers after that have erected it into the body of the work, and made me the author of it. If this has happened within such a short space of time, notwithstanding the aid of printing, which prevents the alteration of copies individually, what may not have happened in a much greater length of time when there was no printing and when any man who could write could make a written copy and call it an original by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.

And in another place, addressing himself to the advocates of those books, as being the word of God, he says, "It is thus that your predecessors have inserted in the scriptures of our Lord many things which though they carry his name, agree not with his doctrine. This is not surprising, *since that we have often proved*, that these things have not been written by himself nor by his apostles, but that, for the greatest part, they are founded upon *tales, upon vague reports*, and put together by I-know not what half-Jews, with but little agreement between them, and which they have, nevertheless, published under the name of the apostles of our Lord, and have thus attributed to them their own *errors and their lies*."*

The reader will see by those extracts that the authenticity of the books of the new testament was denied, and the books treated as tales, forgeries, and lies, at the time they were voted to be the word of God. But the interest of the church, with the assistance of the faggot, bore down the opposition, and at last suppressed all investigation. Miracles followed upon miracles, if we will believe them, and men were taught to say they believed whether they believed or not. But (by way of throwing in a thought) the French revolution has excommunicated the church from the power of working miracles. She has not been able with the assistance of all her saints, to work *one* miracle since the revolution began; and as she never stood in greater need than now, we may, without the aid of divination, conclude that all her former miracles are tricks and lies.†

* I have taken those two extracts from Boulanger's life of Paul written in French. Boulanger has quoted them, from the writings of Augustin against Fauste, to which he refers.

† Boulanger in his life of Paul has collected from the ecclesiastical histories and the writings of the fathers as they are called, several matters which shew the opinions that prevailed among the different sects of Christians which prevailed at the time the testament, as we now see it, was voted to be the word of God. The following extracts are from the second chapter of that work.

"The Marcionists (a Christian sect) assured that the evangelists were filled with falsities. The Manichæens, who formed a very numerous sect at the commencement of Christianity, *rejected as false all the New Testament*, and shewed other writings quite different, that they gave for authentic.—The Cerinthiens, like the Marcionistes, admitted not the Acts of the Apostles.—The Encratites and the Sevenians adopted neither the Acts nor the Epistles of Paul.—Chrysostom, in a homily which he

When we consider the lapse of more than three hundred years intervening between the time that Christ is said to have lived, and the time the new testament was formed into a book, we must see, even without the assistance of historical evidence, the exceeding uncertainty there is of its authenticity. The authenticity of the book of Homer, so far as regards the authorship, is much better established than that of the new testament, though Homer is one thousand years the most ancient. It was only an exceeding good poet that could have written the book of Homer, and therefore few men only could have attempted it; & a man capable of doing it would not have thrown away his own fame by giving it to another. In like manner, there were but few that could have composed Euclid's Elements, because none but an exceeding good geometrician could have been the author of that work.

But with respect to the books of the new testament, particularly such parts as tell us of the resurrection and ascension of Christ, any person that could tell a story of an apparition, or of a *man's walking*, could have made such books; for the story is most wretchedly told. The chance, therefore, of forgery in the testament, is millions to one greater than in the case of Homer or Euclid. Of the numerous priests or parsons of the present day, bishops, and all, every one of them can make a sermon or translate a scrap of latin, especially if it has been translated a thousand times before; but is there any amongst them that can write poetry like Homer, or science like Euclid? The sum total of a parson's learning, with very few exceptions, is *a, b, ab*, and *hic, hæc, hoc*; and their knowledge of science is three times one is *one*; and this is more than sufficient to have enabled them, had they lived at the time, to

“made upon the Acts of the Apostles, says, that in his time about the year
 “400, many people knew nothing either about the author nor of the book
 “—St. Irenee, who lived before that time, reports, that the Valentinians,
 “like several other sects of the Christians, accuse the scriptures of being
 “filled with errors, imperfections and contradictions—The Ebionites, or
 “Nazareans, who were the first Christians, rejected all the Epistles of Paul
 “and regarded him as an impostor. They report, among other things, that
 “he was originally a Pagan, that he came to Jerusalem, where he lived
 “some time, and that having a mind to marry the daughter of the high-
 “priest, he had himself circumcised; but that not being able to obtain her, he
 “quarrelled with the Jews, and wrote against circumcision, and against the
 “observation of the sabbath, and against all the legal ordinances.”

have written all the books of the new testament.

As the opportunities of forgery were greater, so also was the inducement. A man could gain no advantage by writing under the name of Homer or Euclid. If he could write equal to them, it would better that he wrote under his own name; if inferior he could not succeed. Pride would prevent the former, and impossibility the latter. But with respect to such books as compose the new testament, all the inducements were on the side of forgery. The best imagined history that could have been made at the distance of two or three hundred years after the time, could not have passed for an original under the name of the real writer. The only chance of success lay in forgery; for the church wanted pretence for its new doctrine, and truth and talents were out of the question.

But as it is not uncommon (as before observed) to relate stories of persons *walking* after they are dead, and of ghosts and apparitions of such as have fallen by some violent or extraordinary means; and as the people of that day were in the habit of believing such things, and of the appearance of angels, and also of devils, and of their getting into people's insides, and shaking them like a fit of an ague, and of their being cast out again as if by an emetic, (Mary Magdalene, the book of Mark tells us, had brought up, or been brought to bed of, seven devils) it was nothing extraordinary that some story of this kind should get abroad, of the person called Jesus Christ, and become afterwards the foundation of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each writer told the tale as he heard it, or thereabouts, and gave to his book the name of the saint, or the apostle, whom tradition had given as the eye witness. It is only upon this ground that the contradictions in those books can be accounted for; and if this be not the case, they are downright impositions, lies, and forgeries, without even the apology of credulity.

That they have been written by a sort of half-Jews, as the foregoing quotations mention, is enough discernable. The frequent references made to that chief assassin and impostor Moses, and to the men called prophets, establish this point; and on the other hand the church has complimented the fraud by admitting the bible and the testament to reply to each other. Between the Christian-Jew

and the Christian-Gentile, the thing called a prophecy, and the thing prophesied of; the type and the thing typified; the sign and the thing signified; have been industriously rumaged up, and fitted together like old locks and picklock keys. The story, foolishly enough told, of Eve and the serpent, and naturally enough as to the enmity between men and serpents (for the serpent always bites about the *heel*, because it cannot reach higher; and the man always knocks the serpent about the *head* as the most effectual way to prevent its biting;)* this foolish story, I say, has been made into a prophecy, a type, and a promise to begin with: and the lying imposition of Ahaz, that a *virgin shall conceive and bear a son*, as a sign that Ahaz should conquer, when the event was that he was defeated (as already noticed in the observations on the book of Isaiah) has been perverted and made to serve as a winder-up.

Jonah and the whale are also made into a sign and type. Jonah is Jesus, and the whale is the grave; for it is said (and they have made Christ to say it of himself) Matth. chap. xvii. ver. 40, "For as Jonah was *three days and three nights* in the whale's belly, so shall the son of man be *three days and three nights* in the heart of the earth." But it happens awkwardly enough, that Christ, according to their own account, was but one day and two nights in the grave; about 36 hours instead of 72; that is, the Friday night, the Saturday, and the Saturday night; for, they say, he was up on the Sunday morning by sun-rise or before. But as this fits quite as well as the *bite* and the *kick* in Genesis, and the *virgin* and her *son* in Isaiah, it will pass in the lump of *orthodox* things.—Thus much for the historical part of the testament and its evidences.

THE EPISTLES OF PAUL.

The Epistles ascribed to Paul, being fourteen in number, almost fill up the remaining part of the testament. Whether those epistles were written by the person to whom they are ascribed, is a matter of no great importance, since that the writer, whoever he was, attempts to prove

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* It shall bruise thy *head*, and thou shalt bruise his *heel*. Genesis, chap. iii. ver. 15.

his doctrine by argument. He does not pretend to have been witness to any of the scenes told of the resurrection and the ascension, and he declares that he had not believed them.

The story of his being struck to the ground as he was journeying to Damascus, has nothing in it miraculous or extraordinary. He escaped with life, and that is more than many others have done who have been struck with lightning; and that he should lose his sight for three days, and be unable to eat or drink during that time, is nothing more than is common in such conditions. His companions that were with him, appear not to have suffered in the same manner, for they were well enough to lead him the remainder of the journey; neither did they pretend to have seen any vision.

The character of the person called Paul, according to the accounts given of him, has in it a great deal of violence and fanaticism. He had persecuted with as much heat as he preached afterwards. The stroke he had received, had changed his thinking without altering his constitution; and either as a Jew or a Christian he was the same zealot. Such men are never good moral evidences of any doctrine they preach. They are always in extremes, as well of action as of belief.

The doctrine he sets out to prove by argument, is the resurrection of the same body, and he advances this as an evidence of immortality. But so much will men differ in their manner of thinking, and in the conclusions they draw from the same premises, that this doctrine of the resurrection of the same body, so far from being an evidence of immortality, appears to me to furnish an evidence against it: for, if I have already died in this body, and am raised again in the same body in which I have died, it is presumptive evidence that I shall die again. The resurrection no more secures me against the repetition of dying than an ague fit, when past secures me against another. To believe therefore in immortality, I must have a more elevated idea than is contained in this gloomy doctrine of the resurrection.

Besides, as a matter of choice, as well as of hope, I had rather have a better body and a more convenient form, than the present. Every animal in the creation excels us something. The winged insects, without mentioning

doves or eagles, can pass over more space, and with greater ease, in a few minutes, than man can in an hour. The glide of the smallest fish, in proportion to its bulk, exceeds us in motion almost beyond comparison, and without weariness. Even the sluggish snail can ascend from the bottom of a dungeon, where man by the want of that ability would perish, and a spider can launch itself from the top as a playful amusement. The personal powers of man are so limited, and his heavy frame so little constructed to extensive enjoyment, that there is nothing to induce us to wish the opinion of Paul to be true. It is too little for the magnitude of the scene; too mean for the sublimity of the subject.

But all other arguments apart, the *consciousness of existence* is the only conceivable idea we can have of another life, and the continuance of that consciousness is immortality. The consciousness of existence, or the knowing that we exist, is not necessarily confined to the same form, nor to the same matter, even in this life. We have not in all cases the same form, nor in any case the same matter, that composed our bodies twenty or thirty years ago, and yet we are conscious of being the same persons. Even legs and arms which make up half of the human frame, are not necessary to the consciousness of existence. These may be lost or taken away, and the full consciousness of existence remain, and were their places supplied by wings and other appendages, we cannot conceive that it could alter our consciousness of existence. In short, we know not how much, or rather how little, of our composition it is, and how exquisitely fine that little is, that creates in us this consciousness of existence, and all beyond that is like the pulp of a peach, distinct & separate from the vegetative speck in the kernel,

Who can say by what exceeding fine action of fine matter it is, that a thought is produced in what we call the mind; and yet that thought, when produced, as I now produce the thought I am writing, is capable of becoming immortal, and is the only production of man that has that capacity. Statues of brass or marble will perish, and statues made in imitation of them are not the same statues, nor the same workmanship, any more than a copy of a picture is the same picture. But print and reprint a thought a thousand times over, and that, with materials of

any kind, carve it in wood, or engrave it in stone, the thought is eternally and identically the same thought in every case. It has a capacity of unimpaired existence, unaffected by change of matter, and is essentially distinct, and of a nature different, from every thing else that we know of, or can conceive. If then the thing produced has in itself a capacity of being immortal, it is more than a token that the power that produced it, which is the self-same thing as consciousness of existence, can be immortal also ; and that as independently of the matter it was first connected with, as the thought is of the printing or writing it first appeared in. The one idea is not more difficult to believe than the other ; and we can see that one is true.

That the consciousness of existence is not independent on the same form of the same matter, is demonstrated to our senses in the works of the creation, as far as our senses are capable of receiving that demonstration. A very numerous part of the animal creation preaches to us, far better than Paul, the belief of a life hereafter. Their little life resembles an earth and a heaven, a present and a future estate ; and comprises, if it may be so expressed, immortality in miniature.

The most beautiful part of the creation to our eye, are the winged insects, and they are not so originally. They acquire that form and that inimitable brilliancy by progressive changes. The slow and creeping caterpillar-worm of to-day, passes in a few days to a torpid figure and a state resembling death ; and in the next change comes forth in all the miniature magnificence of life, a splendid butterfly. No resemblance of the former creature remains ; every thing is changed ; all his powers are new, and life is to him another thing. We cannot conceive that the consciousness of existence is not the same in this state of the animal as before ; why then must I believe that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue to me the consciousness of existence hereafter ?

In the former part of the *Age of Reason* I have called the creation the true and only real word of God ; and this instance, or this text, in the book of creation, not only shews to us that this thing may be so, but that it is so ; & that the belief of a future state is a *rational belief*, corroborated by facts visible in the creation ; for it is not more

difficult to believe that we shall exist hereafter in a better state and form than at present, than that a worm should become a butterfly, and quit the dunghill for the atmosphere if we did not know it as a fact.

As to the doleful jargon ascribed to Paul in the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians, which makes part of the burial service of some Christian sectaries, it is as destitute of meaning as the tolling of the bell at a funeral. It explains nothing to the understanding; it illustrates nothing to the imagination; but leaves the reader to find any meaning if he can.

“All flesh, says he, is not the same flesh. There is
 “one flesh of men, another of beasts, another of fishes,
 “and another of birds.” And what then? Nothing. A
 cook could have said as much. “There are also, says he,
 “bodies celestial and bodies terrestrial. The glory of the
 “celestial is *one*, and the glory of the terrestrial is the *other*.”
 And what then? Nothing. And what is the difference?
 Nothing that he has told. “There is, says he, one glo-
 “ry of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and a-
 “nother glory of the stars.” And what then? Nothing;
 except that he says that *one star differeth from another star*
in glory, instead of distance; and he might as well have
 told us that the moon did not shine so bright as the sun.
 All this is nothing better than the jargon of a conjurer,
 who picks up phrases he does not understand, to confound
 the credulous people who come to have their fortune told.
 Priests and conjurers are of the same trade.

Sometimes Paul affects to be a naturalist, and to prove
 his system of resurrection from the principles of vegeta-
 tion. “*Thou fool, says he, that which thou sowest is not*
“quickened except it die.” To which one might reply in
 his own language, and say, thou fool, Paul, that which
 thou sowest is not quickened except it die *not*; for the
 grain that dies in the ground never does and cannot vege-
 tate. It is only the living grains that produce the next
 crop. But the metaphor, in any point of view, is no
 simile. It is succession and resurrection. The progress of
 an animal, from one state of Being to another, as from a
 worm to a butterfly, applies to the case, but this of the
 grain does not; and shews Paul to have been, what he
 says of others, a FOOL.

Whether the fourteen epistles ascribed to Paul were
 written by him or not is a matter of indifference. They

are either augmentative or dogmatical ; and as the argument is defective, and the dogmatical part is merely presumptive, it signifies not who wrote them ; and the same may be said for the remaining parts of the testament. It is not upon the epistles, but upon what is called the gospel, contained in the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and upon the pretended prophecies, that the theory of the church, calling itself the Christian church, is founded. The epistles are dependant upon those, and must follow their fate : for if the story of Jesus Christ be fabulous, all reasoning founded upon it as a supposed truth, must fall with it.

We know from history, that one of the principal leaders of this church, Athanasius, lived at the time the new testament was formed, and we know also from the absurd jargon he has left us, under the name of a creed, the character of the men who formed the new testament ;* and we know also from the same history, that the authenticity of the books of which it is composed, was denied at the time. It is upon the vote of such men as Athanasius, that the testament was decreed to be the word of God, and nothing can present to us a more strange idea than that of decreeing the word of God by vote. Those who rest their faith upon such authority, put man in the place of God, and have no true foundation for future happiness. Credulity, however, is not a crime ; but it becomes criminal by resisting conviction. It is strangling in the womb of the conscience the efforts it makes to ascertain truth. We should never force belief upon ourselves in any thing.

I here close the subject on the old testament and the new. The evidence I have produced to prove them forgeries, are extracted from the books themselves, and acts, like a two-edged sword, either way. If the evidence be denied, the authenticity of the scriptures is denied with it, for it is scripture evidence ; and if the evidence be admitted, the authenticity of the books is disproved. The contradictory impossibilities contained in the old testament and the new, put them in the case of a man who swears *for* and *against*. Either evidence convicts him of perjury, and equally destroys reputation.

Should the bible and testament hereafter fall, it is not I that have done it. I have done no more than extracted

* Athanasius died, according to the church chronology, in the year 371.

the evidence from the confused mass of matters with which it is mixed, and arranged that evidence in a point of light to be clearly seen and easily comprehended ; and having done this, I leave the reader to judge for himself, as I have judged for myself.

CONCLUSION.

IN the former part of the *Age of Reason*, I have spoken of the three frauds, *mystery*, *miracle*, and *prophecy* ; and as I have seen nothing in any of the answers to that work that in the least affects what I have there said upon those subjects, I shall not encumber this second with additions that are not necessary.

I have spoken also in the same work upon what is called *revelation*, and have shewn the absurd misapplication of that term to the books of the old testament and the new ; for certainly revelation is out of the question in reciting any thing of which man has been the actor or the witness. That which a man has done or seen, needs no revelation to tell him he has done it or seen it, for he knows it already, nor to enable him to tell it or to write it. It is ignorance or imposition to apply the term revelation in such cases ; yet the bible and testament are classed under this fraudulent description of being all *revelation*.

Revelation then, so far as the term has relation between God and man, can only be applied to something which God reveals of his *will* to man. But the power of the Almighty to make such a communication is necessarily admitted, because to that power all things are possible, yet the thing so revealed, (if any thing ever was revealed, and which, by the bye, it is impossible to prove) is revelation to the person *only to whom it is made*. His account of it to another is not revelation ; and whoever puts faith in that account, puts it in the man from whom the account comes ; and that man may have been deceived, or may have dreamed it, or he may be an impostor and may lie. There is no possible criterion whereby to judge the truth of what he tells ; for even the morality of it would be no proof of revelation. In all such cases, the proper answer would be, "*When it is revealed to me, I will believe it to be revelation, but it is not and cannot be incumbent upon me to believe it to be revelation before ; neither is it proper that I should take the word of man as the word of God, and put man in the place of God.*"

This is the manner in which I have spoken of revelation in the former part of the *Age of Reason*; and which, whilst it reverentially admits revelation as a possible thing, because, (as before said) to the Almighty all things are possible, it prevents the imposition of one man upon another, and precludes the wicked use of pretended revelation.

But though, speaking for myself, I thus admit the possibility of revelation, I totally disbelieve that the Almighty ever did communicate any thing to man by any mode of speech in any language, or by any kind of vision or appearance, or by any means which our senses are capable of receiving; otherwise than by the universal display of himself in the works of the creation, and by that repugnance we feel in ourselves to bad actions, and disposition to good ones.

The most detestable wickednesses, the most horrid cruelties, and the greatest miseries that have afflicted the human race, have had their origin in this thing called revelation or revealed religion. It has been the most dishonourable belief against the character of the divinity, the most destructive to morality and the peace and happiness of man, that ever was propagated since man began to exist. It is better, far better, that we admit, if it were possible, a thousand devils to roam at large, and to preach publicly the doctrine of devils, if there were any such, than that we permitted one such impostor and monster as Moses, Joshua, Samuel and the bible prophets, to come with the pretended word of God in his mouth, and have credit among us.

Whence arose all the horrid assassination of whole nation of men, women, and infants, with which the bible is filled, and the bloody persecution and tortures unto death, and religious wars, that since that time, have laid Europe in blood and ashes? Whence arose they, but from this impious thing called revealed religion: and their monstrous belief that God had spoken to man. The lies of the bible have been the cause of the one, and the lies of the testament of the other.

Some Christians pretend that Christianity was not established by the sword. But of what period of time do they speak? It was impossible that *twelve* men could *begin* with the sword; they had not the power; but no sooner were the professors of Christianity sufficiently powerful to employ the sword, than they did so; and the stake and the faggot too; and Mahomet could not do it sooner. By the same spirit that Peter cut off the ear of the high

priest's servant, (if the story be true) he would have cut off his head and the head of his master had he been able. Besides this, Christianity founds itself originally upon the bible, and the bible was established altogether by the sword, and that in the worst use of it; not to terrify, but to extirpate. The Jews made no converts; they butchered all. The bible is the fire of the testament, and both are called the *word of God*; the Christians read both books; the ministers preach from both books; and this thing, called Christianity, is made up of both. It is then false to say that Christianity was not established by the sword.

The only sect that has not persecuted, are the Quakers, and the only reason that that can be given for it is, that they are rather Deists than Christians. They do not believe much about Jesus Christ, and they call the scriptures a dead letter. Had they called them by a worse name, they had been nearer the truth.

It is incumbent on every man who reverences the character of the Creator, and who wishes to lessen the catalogue of artificial miseries, and remove the cause that has sown persecutions thick among mankind, to expel all ideas of a revealed religion, as a dangerous heresy, and an impious fraud. What is it that we have learned from this pretended thing called *revealed religion*? Nothing that is useful to man, and every thing that is dishonourable to his Maker. What is it the bible teaches us? Rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it the testament teaches us? To believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman engaged to be married; and the belief of this debauchery is called faith.

As to the fragments of morality that are irregularly and thinly scattered in those books, they make no part of this pretended thing revealed religion. They are the natural dictates of conscience, and the bonds by which society is held together, and without which it cannot exist, and are nearly the same in all religions and in all societies. The testament teaches nothing new upon this subject, and where it attempts to exceed it becomes mean and ridiculous. The doctrine of not retaliating injuries is much better expressed in Proverbs, which is a collection as well from the Gentiles as the Jews, than it is in the testament. It is there said, Proverbs xxiv. ver. 21. *If thine enemy be hungry give him bread to eat, and if he be thirsty give him water to drink.**

* According to what is called Christ's sermon on the mount (in the book of Matthew) where, among some other good things, a great deal of

But when it is said, as in the testament, *if a man smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*; it is assassinating the dignity of forbearance and sinking man into a spaniel.

Loving of enemies is another dogma of feigned morality, and has besides no meaning. It is incumbent on man as a moralist that he does not revenge an injury; and it is equally as good in a political sense; for there is no end to retaliation; each retaliates on the other, and calls it justice. But to love in proportion to the injury, if it could be done, would be to offer a premium for crime. Besides, the word *enemies* is too vague and general to be used in a moral maxim, which ought always to be clear and defined like a proverb. If a man be the enemy of another from mistake and prejudice, as in the case of religious opinions, and sometimes in politics, that man is different to an enemy at heart with a criminal intention, and it is incumbent upon us, and contributes also to our own tranquillity, that we put the best construction upon a thing it will bear; but even this erroneous motive in him makes no motive for love on the other part; and to say that we can love voluntarily, and without a motive, is morally and physically impossible.

Morality is injured by prescribing to its duties, that, in the first place, are impossible to be performed, and if they could be, would be productive of evil; or, as before said, be premiums for crime. The maxim of *doing as we would be done unto*, does not include this strange doctrine of loving enemies; for no man expects to be loved himself for his crime or for his enmity.

Those who preach this doctrine of loving their enemies, are in general the greatest persecutors, and they act consistently by so doing; for the doctrine is hypocritical, and it is natural that hypocrisy should act the reverse of what it preaches. For my own part I disown the doctrine, and consider it as feigned or fabulous morality: yet the this feigned morality is introduced; it is there expressly said, that the doctrine of forbearance, or of not retaliating injuries, was *not any part of the doctrine of the Jews*; but as this doctrine is found in Proverbs, it must, according to that statement, have been copied from the Gentiles, from whom Christ had learned it. Those men, whom Jewish and Christian idolaters have abusively called heathen, had much better and clearer ideas of justice and morality than are to be found in the old testament, so far as it is Jewish, or in the new. The answer of Solon on the question, "Which is the most perfect popular government?" has never been exceeded by any man since his time, as containing a maxim of political morality. "That, says he, *where the least injury done to the meanest individual is considered as an insult on the whole constitution.*" Solon lived above 500 years before Christ.

man does not exist that can say I have persecuted him or any man, or any set of men, either in the American revolution or in the French revolution; or that I have in any case returned evil for evil; but it is not incumbent on man to reward a bad action with a good one, or to return good for evil, and wherever it is done, it is a voluntary act and not a duty. It is also absurd to suppose that such doctrine can make any part of a revealed religion. We imitate the moral character of the Creator by forbearing with each other; for he forbears with all: but this doctrine would imply that he loved man not in proportion as he was good, but as he was bad.

If we consider the nature of our condition here, we must see there is no occasion for such thing as a *revealed religion*. What is it we want to know? Does not the creation, the universe we behold, preach to us the existence of an Almighty power, that governs and regulates the whole; and is not the evidence that this creation holds out to our senses infinitely stronger than any thing we can read in a book, that any impostor might make, and call it the word of God. As for morality, the knowledge of it exists in every man's conscience.

Here we are. The existence of an Almighty power is sufficiently demonstrated to us, though we cannot conceive, as it is impossible we should, the nature and manner of its existence. We cannot conceive how we came here ourselves, and yet we know for a fact that we are here. We must know also that the power that called us into being, can, if he please, and when he please, call us to account for the manner in which we have lived here; and therefore, without seeking any other motive for the belief, it is rational to believe that he will, for we know before hand that he can. The probability or even possibility of the thing, is all that we ought to know; for if we knew it as a fact, we should be the mere slaves of terror. Our belief would have no merit, and our best actions no virtue.

Deism then teaches us, without the possibility of being deceived, all that is necessary or proper to be known. The creation is the bible of the deist. He there reads, in the hand writing of the Creator himself, the certainty of his existence, and the immutability of his power; and all bibles and testaments are to him forgeries. The probability that we may be called to account hereafter, will, to re-

lecting minds, have the influence of belief; for it is not our belief or our disbelief, that can make or unmake the fact. As this is the state we are in, and which it is proper we should be in as free agents, it is the fool only, and not the philosopher, nor even the prudent man, that will live as if there were no God.

But the belief of a God is so weakened by being mixed with the strange fable of the Christian creed, and with the wild adventures related in the bible, and the obscurity and obscene nonsense of the testament, that the mind of man is bewildered as in a fog. Viewing all these things in a confused mass, he confounds fact with fable, and, as he cannot believe all, he feels a disposition to reject all. But the belief of a God is a belief distinct from all other things, and ought not to be confounded with any. The notion of a trinity of gods has enfeebled the belief of *one* God. A multiplication of belief acts as a division of belief, and in proportion as any thing is divided it is weakened.

Religion, by such means, becomes a thing of form instead of fact; of notion instead of principle; morality is banished to make room for an imaginary thing called faith, and this faith has its origin in a supposed debauchery. A man is preached instead of a God; an execution as an object of gratitude; the preachers daub themselves with the blood like a troop of assassins and pretend to admire the brilliancy it gives them. They preach a humdrum sermon on the merits of the execution; praise Jesus Christ for being executed: and condemn the Jews for doing it. A man, by hearing all this nonsense lumped and preached together, confounds the God of the creation with the imagined God of the Christians, and lives as if there were none.

Of all the system of religion, that ever were invented, there is none more derogatory to the Almighty, and more modifying to man, more repugnant to reason, and more contradictory in itself than this thing called Christianity. Too absurd for belief, too impossible to convince, and inconsistent for practice, it renders the heart torpid or produces only atheists and fanatics. As an engine of power it serves the purpose of despotism; and a means of wealth, the avarice of priests; but so far as respects the good of man in general, it leads to nothing here or hereafter.

The only religion that has not been invented, and that

has in it every evidence of divine originality, is true and simple deism. It must have been the first, and probably be the last that man believes : but pure and simple deism does not answer the purpose of despotic governments. They cannot lay hold of religion as an engine, but by mixing it with human inventions, and making their own authority a part ; neither does it answer the avarice of priests, but by incorporating themselves and their functions with it, and becoming, like the government, a party in the system. It is this that forms the otherwise mysterious connection of church and state. The church human, and the state tyrannic.

Were man impressed as fully and as strongly as he ought to be with the belief of a God, his moral life would be regulated by the force of that belief. He would stand in awe of God and of himself, and would do nothing that could not be concealed from either. To give this belief the full opportunity of force, it is necessary that it acts alone ; this is deism : but when, according to the Christian trinitarian scheme, one part of God is represented by a dying man, and another part called the holy ghost, by a flying pigeon, it is impossible that belief can attach to such wild conceits.*

It has been the scheme of the Christian church, and of all other invented systems of religion, to hold man in ignorance of the Creator, as it is of government to hold him in ignorance of his rights. The systems of the one are as false as those of the other, and are calculated for mutual support. The study of theology, as it stands in Christian churches, is the study of nothing. It is founded in nothings ; it rests on no principles ; it proceeds by no authorities ; it has no data ; it can demonstrate nothing ; and admits of no conclusion. Not any thing can be studied as a science without our being in possession of the principles upon which it is founded ; and as this is the case of Christian theology, it is therefore, the study of nothing.

Instead then of studying the theology, as is now done, out of the bible and testament, the meaning of which books are always controverted and authenticity of which is dispraved, it is necessary that we refer to the bible of

* The book called the book of Matthew, says, chap. iii, ver. 16, that *the holy ghost descended in the shape of a dove*. It might as well have said, a goose. The creatures are equally harmless, and the one is much a non-sensical lie as the other. The 2d of Acts, ver. 2, 3, says, that it descended in a *mighty rushing wind, in the shape of eleven tongues*. Perhaps it was cloven feet. Such absurd stuff is fit only for tales of witches and wizzards.

the creation. The principles we discover there are eternal and of divine origin. They are the foundation of all the science that exists in the world, and must be the foundation of theology. We can know God only through his works. We cannot have a conception of any one attribute but by following some principle that leads to it. We have only a confused idea of his power, if we have not the means of comprehending something of its immensity. We can have no idea of his wisdom but by knowing the order and manner which it it acts. The principles of science lead to this knowledge; for the creator of man is the creator of science, and it is through that medium that man can see God, as it were, face to face.

Could a man be placed in a situation, and endowed with power of vision, to behold at one view, and to contemplate deliberately, the structure of the universe, to mark the movements of the several planets, the cause of their varying appearances, the unerring order in which they revolve even to the remotest comet, their connection and dependence on each other, and to know the system of laws, established by the Creator, that governs and regulates the whole, he would then conceive far beyond what any church theology can teach him, the power, the wisdom, the vastness, the munificence of the Creator. He would then see that all the knowledge man has of science and that all the mechanical arts by which he renders his situation comfortable there are derived from that source. His mind exalted by the scene, and convinced by the fact, would increase in gratitude as it increased in knowledge. His religion or his worship would become united with his improvement as a man; and an employment he followed, that had connection with the principles of the creation, as every thing of agriculture, of science, and of the mechanical arts has, would teach him more of God, and of the gratitude he owes to him, than any theological Christian sermon he now hears. Great objects inspire great thoughts—great munificence excites great gratitude: but the groveling tales and doctrines of the bible and testament are fit only to excite contempt.

Though man cannot arrive, at least in this life, at the actual scene I have described, he can demonstrate it; because he has knowledge of the principles upon which the creation is constructed. We know that the greatest works can be represented in model, and that the universe can be represented by the same means. The same principle by which we measure an inch or an acre of ground will

measure to millions in extent. A circle of an inch diameter has the same geometrical properties as a circle that would circumscribe the universe. The same properties of a triangle that will demonstrate upon paper the course of a ship, will do it on the ocean ; and when applied to what are called the heavenly bodies, will ascertain to a minute the time of an eclipse, though those bodies are millions of miles distant from the bible of the creation that man has learned it, and not from the stupid bible of the church that teaches man nothing.*

All the knowledge man has of science and of machinery, by the aid of which his existence is rendered comfortable upon earth, and without which he would be scarcely distinguishable in appearance and condition from a common animal, comes from the great machine and structure of the universe. The constant and unwearied observations of our ancestors upon the movements and revolutions of the heavenly bodies, in what are supposed to have been the early ages of the world, has brought this knowledge upon earth. It is not Moses and the prophets, nor Jesus Christ, nor his apostles, that have done it. The Almighty is the great mechanick of the creation ; the first philosopher and the original teacher of all science. Let us then learn to reverence our master, and not forget the labours of our ancestors.

Had we at this day no knowledge of machinery, and were it possible that man could have a view, as I have before described of the structure and machination of the universe, he would soon conceive the idea of constructing some, at least, of the mechanical works we now have, and, the idea so conceived, would progressively advance in practice. Or could a model of the universe, such as is cal-

* The bible-makers have undertaken to give us, in the first chapter of Genesis, an account of the creation, and in doing this they have demonstrated nothing but their ignorance. They make there to have been three days and three nights, evenings and mornings, before there was a sun, when it is the presence or absence of the sun that is the cause of day and night ; and, what is called, his rising and setting, that of morning and evening. Besides, it is a puerile and pitiful idea to suppose the Almighty to say, *Let there be light*. It is the imperative manner of speaking that a conjurer uses, when he says to his cups and balls, *d'resto be gone* ; and most probably has been taken from it ; as Moses and his rod is a conjurer and his wand. Longinus calls this expression, the *sublime* ; and by the same rule that of the conjurer is sublime too, for the manner is expressively and grammatically the same. When authors and critics talk of the sublime, they see not how nearly it borders on the ridiculous. The sublime of the critics, like some parts of Edmund Burke's "*Sublime and beautiful*," is like a windmill just visible in a fog, which imagination might distort into a flying mountain, an arch-angel or a flock of wild geese.

led an orrery, be presented before him and put in motion his mind would arrive at the same idea. Such an object and such a subject would, whilst it improved him in knowledge useful to himself as a man and a member of society, as well as entertaining, afford far better matter for impressing him with a knowledge of, and a belief in, the Creator, and of the reverence and gratitude that man owes to him, than the stupid texts of the bible and the testament, from which, be the talents of the preacher what they may, only stupid sermons can be preached. If man must preach, let him preach something that is edifying, and from texts that are known to be true.

The bible of the creation is inexhaustible in texts. Every part of science, whether connected with the geometry of the universe, with the systems of amnity and vegetable life, or with the properties of inanimate matter, is a text as well for devotion as for philosophy, as for gratitude, as for human improvement. It will perhaps be said, that if such a revolution in the system of religion take place, that every preacher ought to be a philosopher. *Most certainly*; and every house of devotion, a school of science.

It has been by wandering from the immutable laws of science, and the light of reason, and setting up an invented thing, called *revealed religion*, that so many wild and blasphemous conceits have been formed of the Almighty. the Jews have made him the assassin of the human species, to make room for the religion of the Jews; the Christians have made him the murderer of himself, and a founder of a new religion to supercede and expel the Jewish religion, and to find pretence and admission for these things, they must have supposed his power or his wisdom imperfect, or his will changeable; and the changeableness of the will is the imperfection of the judgment. The philosopher knows that the laws of the Creator have never changed with respect either to the principles of science or the properties of matter. Why then is it to be supposed they have changed with respect to man.

I here close the subject. I have shewn in all the foregoing part of this work, that the bible and testament are impositions and forgeries; and I leave the evidence, I have produced in proof of it, to be refuted, if any one can do it; & I leave the ideas that are suggested in the conclusion of the work, to rest on the mind of the reader; certain as I am, that when opinions are free, either in matters of government or religion, truth will finally and powerfully prevail.

END OF THE SECOND PART.

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A N
A P O L O G Y

FOR THE
B I B L E,

I N A

Series of Letters,

ADDRESSED TO

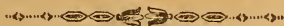
THOMAS PAINE,

Author of a Book entitled, 'The Age of Reason, Part the Second,
being an Investigation of True and of Fabulous Theology.



By R. WATSON, D. D. F. R. S.

LORD BISHOP OF LANDAFF, AND REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.



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A N

A P O L O G Y, &c.

Letter I.

S I R,

I HAVE lately met with a book of yours, entitled—THE AGE OF REASON, part the second, being an investigation of true and of fabulous theology ;—and I think it not inconsistent with my station, and the duty I owe to society, to trouble you and the world with some observations on so extraordinary a performance. Extraordinary I esteem it ; not from any novelty in the objections which you have produced against revealed religion, (for I find little or no novelty in them,) but from the zeal with which you labour to disseminate your opinions, and from the confidence with which you esteem them true. You perceive, by this, that I give you credit for your sincerity, how much soever I may question your wisdom, in writing in such a manner on such a subject : and I have no reluctance in acknowledging, that you possess a considerable share of energy of language, and acuteness of investigation ; though I must be allowed to lament, that these talents have not been applied in a manner more useful to human kind, and more creditable to yourself.

I begin

I begin with your preface. You therein state, that you had long had an intention of publishing your thoughts upon religion, but that you had originally reserved it to a later period in life. I hope there is no want of charity in saying, that it would have been fortunate for the Christian world, had your life been terminated before you had fulfilled your intention. In accomplishing your purpose you will have unsettled the faith of thousands; rooted from the minds of the unhappy virtuous all their comfortable assurance of a future recompense; have annihilated in the minds of the flagitious all their fears of future punishment; you will have given the reins to the domination of every passion, and have thereby contributed to the introduction of the public insecurity, and of the private unhappiness, usually and almost necessarily accompanying a state of corrupted morals.

No one can think worse of confession to a priest, and subsequent absolution, as practised in the church of Rome, than I do: but I cannot, with you, attribute the guillotine-massacres to that cause. Men's minds were not prepared, as you suppose, for the commission of all manner of crimes, by any doctrines of the church of Rome, corrupted as I esteem it, but by their not thoroughly believing even that religion. What may not society expect from those, who shall imbibe the principles of your book?

A fever, which you and those about you expected would prove mortal, made you remember, with renewed satisfaction, that you had written the former part of your Age of Reason; and you know therefore, you say, by experience,

experience, the conscientious trial of your own principles. I admit this declaration to be a proof of the sincerity of your persuasion, but I cannot admit it to be any proof of the truth of your principles. What is conscience? Is it, as has been thought, an internal monitor implanted in us by the Supreme Being, and dictating to us, on all occasions, what is right or wrong? Or is it merely our own judgment of the moral rectitude or turpitude of our own actions? I take the word (with Mr. Locke) in the latter, as in the only intelligible sense. Now who sees not that our judgments of virtue and vice, right and wrong, are not always formed from an enlightened and dispassionate use of our reason, in the investigation of truth? They are more generally formed from the nature of the religion we profess; from the quality of the civil government under which we live; from the general manners of the age, or the particular manners of the persons with whom we associate; from the education we have had in our youth; from the books we have read at a more advanced period; and from other accidental causes. Who sees not that, on this account, conscience may be conformable or repugnant to the law of nature?—may be certain, or doubtful?—and that it can be no criterion of moral rectitude, even when it is certain, because the certainty of an opinion is no proof of its being a right opinion? A man may be certainly persuaded of an error in reasoning, or of an untruth in matters of fact. It is a maxim of every law, human and divine, that a man ought never to act in opposition to his conscience :

but it will not from thence follow, that he will, in obeying the dictates of his conscience, on all occasions act right. An inquisitor, who burns Jews and heretics ; a Robespierre, who massacres innocent and harmless women ; a robber, who thinks that all things ought to be in common, and that a state of property is an unjust infringement of natural liberty :—these, and a thousand perpetrators of different crimes, may all follow the dictates of conscience ; and may, at the real or supposed approach of death, remember “ with renewed satisfaction ” the worst of their transactions, and experience, without dismay, “ a conscientious trial of their principles.” But this their conscientious composure can be no proof to others of the rectitude of their principles, and ought to be no pledge to themselves of their innocence, in adhering to them.

I have thought fit to make this remark, with a view of suggesting to you a consideration of great importance—whether you have examined calmly, and according to the best of your ability, the arguments by which the truth of revealed religion may, in the judgment of learned and impartial men, be established ?—You will allow, that thousands of learned and impartial men, (I speak not of priests, who, however, are, I trust, as learned and impartial as yourself, but of laymen of the most splendid talents)—you will allow, that thousands of these, in all ages, have embraced revealed religion as true. Whether these men have all been in an error, enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, shackled by the chains of superstition,

tion, whilst you and a few others have enjoyed light and liberty, is a question I submit to the decision of your readers.

If you have made the best examination you can, and yet reject revealed religion as an imposture, I pray that God may pardon what I esteem your error. And whether you have made this examination or not, does not become me or any man to determine. That gospel, which you despise, has taught me this moderation; it has said to me—"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth." I think that you are in an error; but whether that error be to you a vincible or an invincible error, I presume not to determine. I know indeed where it is said—"that the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness,—and that if the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost."

The consequence of your unbelief must be left to the just and merciful judgment of Him, who alone knoweth the mechanism and the liberty of our understandings; the origin of our opinions; the strength of our prejudices; the excellencies and the defects of our reasoning faculties.

I shall, designedly, write this and the following letters in a popular manner; hoping that thereby they may stand a chance of being perused by that class of readers, for whom your work seems to be particularly calculated, and who are the most likely to be injured by it. The really learned are in no danger of being infected by the poison of infidelity: they will excuse me, therefore, for having entered, as
little

little as possible, into deep disquisitions concerning the authenticity of the Bible. The subject has been so learnedly, and so frequently, handled by other writers, that it does not want (I had almost said, it does not admit) any farther proof. And it is the more necessary to adopt this mode of answering your book, because you disclaim all learned appeals to other books, and undertake to prove, from the Bible itself, that it is unworthy of credit. I hope to shew, from the Bible itself, the direct contrary. But in case any of your readers should think that you had not put forth all your strength, by not referring for proof of your opinion to ancient authors; lest they should suspect that all ancient authors are in your favour; I will venture to affirm, that, had you made a learned appeal to all the ancient books in the world, sacred or profane, Christian, Jewish, or Pagan, instead of lessening, they would have established, the credit and authority of the Bible as the Word of God.

Quitting your preface, let us proceed to the work itself; in which there is much repetition, and a defect of proper arrangement. I will follow your track, however, as nearly as I can. The first question you propose for consideration is—"Whether there is sufficient authority for believing the Bible to be the Word of God, or whether there is not?"—You determine this question in the negative, upon what you are pleased to call moral evidence. You hold it impossible that the Bible can be the Word of God, because it is therein said, that the Israelites destroyed the Canaanites by the express command

command of God : and to believe the Bible to be true, we must, you affirm, unbelieve all our belief of the moral justice of God ; for wherein, you ask, could crying or smiling infants offend ?—I am astonished that so acute a reasoner should attempt to disparage the Bible, by bringing forward this exploded and frequently refuted objection of Morgan, Tindal, and Bolingbroke. You profess yourself to be a deist, and to believe that there is a God, who created the universe, and established the laws of nature, by which it is sustained in existence. You profess that from the contemplation of the works of God, you derive a knowledge of his attributes ; and you reject the Bible, because it ascribes to God things inconsistent (as you suppose) with the attributes which you have discovered to belong to him ; in particular, you think it repugnant to his moral justice, that he should doom to destruction the crying or smiling infants of the Canaanites. Why do you not maintain it to be repugnant to his moral justice, that he should suffer crying or smiling infants to be swallowed up by an earthquake, drowned by an inundation, consumed by a fire, starved by a famine, or destroyed by a pestilence ? The Word of God is in perfect harmony with his work ; crying or smiling infants are subjected to death in both. We believe that the earth, at the express command of God, opened her mouth, and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. This you esteem so repugnant to God's moral justice, that you spurn, as spurious, the book in which the circumstance is related. When Ca-

tania,

tania, Lima, and Lisbon, were severally destroyed by earthquakes, men with their wives, their sons, and their little ones, were swallowed up alive :—Why do you not spurn, as spurious, the book of nature, in which this fact is certainly written, and from the perusal of which you infer the moral justice of God ? You will, probably, reply, that the evils which the Canaanites suffered from the express command of God, were different from those which are brought on mankind by the operation of the laws of nature. Different ! in what ?—Not in the magnitude of the evil—not in the subjects of sufferance—not in the author of it—for my philosophy, at least, instructs me to believe, that God not only primarily formed, but that he hath through all ages executed the laws of nature ; and that he will through all eternity administer them, for the general happiness of his creatures, whether we can, on every occasion, discern that end or not.

I am far from being guilty of the impiety of questioning the existence of the moral justice of God, as proved either by natural or revealed religion ; what I contend for is shortly this—that you have no right, in fairness of reasoning, to urge any apparent deviation from moral justice, as an argument against revealed religion, because you do not urge an equally apparent deviation from it, as an argument against natural religion : you reject the former, and admit the latter, without considering that, as to your objection, they must stand or fall together.

As to the Canaanites, it is needless to enter into any proof of the depraved state of their morals ;

morals ; they were a wicked people in the time of Abraham, and they, even then, were devoted to destruction by God ; but their iniquity was not then full. In the time of Moses, they were idolaters, sacrificers of their own crying or smiling infants ; devourers of human flesh ; addicted to unnatural lust ; immersed in the filthiness of all manner of vice. Now, I think, it will be impossible to prove, that it was a proceeding contrary to God's moral justice, to exterminate so wicked a people. He made the Israelites the executors of his vengeance ; and, in doing this, he gave such an evident and terrible proof of his abomination of vice, as could not fail to strike the surrounding nations with astonishment and terror, and to impress on the minds of the Israelites what they were to expect, if they followed the example of the nations whom he commanded them to cut off. "Ye shall not commit any of these abominations—that the land spue not you out also, as it spued out the nations that were before you." How strong and descriptive this language ! the vices of the inhabitants were so abominable, that the very land was sick of them, and forced to vomit them forth, as the stomach disgorges a deadly poison.

I have often wondered what could be the reason that men, not destitute of talents, should be desirous of undermining the authority of revealed religion, and studious in exposing, with a malignant and illiberal exultation, every little difficulty attending the scriptures, to popular animadversion and contempt. I am not willing to attribute this strange propensity to what
Plato

Plato attributed the atheism of his time—to profligacy of manners—to affectation of singularity—to gross ignorance, assuming the semblance of deep research and superior sagacity ; I had rather refer it to an impropriety of judgment, respecting the manners, and mental acquirements, of human kind in the first ages of the world. Most unbelievers argue as if they thought that man, in remote and rude antiquity, in the very birth and infancy of our species, had the same distinct conceptions of one, eternal, invisible, incorporeal, infinitely wise, powerful, and good God, which they themselves have now. This I look upon as a great mistake, and a pregnant source of infidelity. Human kind, by long experience ; by the institutions of civil society ; by the cultivation of arts and sciences ; by, as I believe, divine instruction actually given to some, and traditionally communicated to all ; is in a far more distinguished situation, as to the powers of the mind, than it was in the childhood of the world. The history of man is the history of the providence of God ; who, willing the supreme felicity of all his creatures, has adapted his government to the capacity of those, who in different ages were the subjects of it. The history of any one nation throughout all ages, and that of all nations in the same age, are but separate parts of one great plan, which God is carrying on for the moral melioration of mankind. But who can comprehend the whole of this immense design ? The shortness of life, the weakness of our faculties, the inadequacy of our means of information, conspire to make it impossible for us,

us, worms of the earth ! insects of an hour ! completely to understand any one of its parts. No man, who well weighs the subject, ought to be surprised, that in the histories of ancient times many things should occur foreign to our manners, the propriety and necessity of which we cannot clearly apprehend.

It appears incredible to many, that God Almighty should have had colloquial intercourse with our first parents ; that he should have contracted a kind of friendship for the patriarchs, and entered into covenants with them ; that he should have suspended the laws of nature in Egypt ; should have been so apparently partial as to become the God and governor of one particular nation ; and should have so far demeaned himself, as to give to that people a burdensome ritual of worship, statutes and ordinances, many of which seem to be beneath the dignity of his attention, unimportant and impolitic. I have conversed with many deists, and have always found that the strangeness of these things was the only reason for their disbelief of them : nothing similar has happened in their time ; they will not, therefore, admit, that these events have really taken place at any time. As well might a child, when arrived at a state of manhood, contend that he had never either stood in need of or experienced the fostering care of a mother's kindness, the wearisome attention of his nurse, or the instruction and discipline of his schoolmaster. The Supreme Being selected one family from an idolatrous world ; nursed it up, by various acts of his providence, into a great nation ; communicated to that nation a knowledge

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of

of his holiness, justice, mercy, power, and wisdom ; disseminated them, at various times, through every part of the earth, that they might be a "leaven to leaven the whole lump," that they might assure all other nations of the existence of one supreme God, the creator and preserver of the world, the only proper object of adoration. With what reason can we expect, that what was done to one nation, not out of any partiality to them, but for the general good, should be done to all? that the mode of instruction, which was suited to the infancy of the world, should be extended to the maturity of its manhood, or to the imbecility of its old age? I own to you, that when I consider how nearly man, in a savage state, approaches to the brute creation, as to intellectual excellence ; and when I contemplate his miserable attainments, as to the knowledge of God, in a civilized state, when he has had no divine instruction on the subject, or when that instruction has been forgotten, (for all men have known something of God from tradition,) I cannot but admire the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Being, in having let himself down to our apprehensions ; in having given to mankind, in the earliest ages, sensible and extraordinary proofs of his existence and attributes ; in having made the Jewish and Christian dispensations mediums to convey to all men, through all ages, that knowledge concerning himself, which he had vouchsafed to give immediately to the first. I own it is strange, very strange, that he should have made an immediate manifestation of himself in the first ages of the world ; but what is there that

that is not strange? It is strange that you and I are here—that there is water, and earth, and air, and fire—that there is a sun, and moon, and stars—that there is generation, corruption, reproduction. I can account ultimately for none of these things, without recurring to Him who made every thing. I also am his workmanship, and look up to him with hope of preservation through all eternity; I adore him for his word as well as for his work: his work I cannot comprehend: but his word hath assured me of all that I am concerned to know—that he hath prepared everlasting happiness for those who love and obey him. This you will call preachment,—I will have done with it; but the subject is so vast, and the plan of providence, in my opinion, so obviously wise and good, that I can never think of it without having my mind filled with piety, admiration and gratitude.

In addition to the moral evidence (as you are pleased to think it) against the Bible, you threaten, in the progress of your work, to produce such other evidence as even a priest cannot deny. A philosopher in search of truth forfeits with me all claim to candour and impartiality, when he introduces railing for reasoning, vulgar and illiberal sarcasm in the room of argument. I will not imitate the example you set me; but examine what you shall produce, with as much coolness and respect, as if you had given the priests no provocation; as if you were a man of the most unblemished character, subject to no prejudices, actuated by no bad designs, not liable to have abuse retorted upon you with success.

Letter II.

S I R,

BEFORE you commence your grand attack upon the Bible, you wish to establish a difference between the evidence necessary to prove the authenticity of the Bible, and that of any other ancient book. I am not surprised at your anxiety on this head; for all writers on the subject have agreed in thinking that St. Austin reasoned well, when, in vindicating the genuineness of the Bible, he asked—"What proofs have we that the works of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Varro, and other profane authors, were written by those whose names they bear; unless it be that this has been an opinion generally received at all times, and by all those who have lived since these authors?" This writer was convinced, that the evidence which established the genuineness of any profane book, would establish that of a sacred book; and I profess myself to be of the same opinion, notwithstanding what you have advanced to the contrary.

In this part your ideas seem to me to be confused; I do not say that you, designedly, jumble together mathematical science and historical evidence; the knowledge acquired by demonstration, and the probability derived from testimony. You know but of one ancient book, that authoritatively challenges universal consent and belief, and that is Euclid's Elements. If I were disposed to make frivolous objections, I should

should say that even Euclid's Elements had not met with universal consent ; that there had been men, both in ancient and modern times, who had questioned the intuitive evidence of some of his axioms, and denied the justness of some of his demonstrations : but, admitting the truth, I do not see the pertinency of your observation. You are attempting to subvert the authenticity of the Bible, and you tell us that Euclid's Elements are certainly true. What then ?—Does it follow that the Bible is certainly false ? The most illiterate scrivener in the kingdom does not want to be informed that the examples in his Wingate's Arithmetic, are proved by a different kind of reasoning from that by which he persuades himself to believe, that there was such a person as Henry VIII. or that there is such a city as Paris.

It may be of use, to remove this confusion in your argument, to state, distinctly, the difference between the genuineness, and the authenticity, of a book. A genuine book, is that which was written by the person whose name it bears, as the author of it. An authentic book, is that which relates matters of fact, as they really happened. A book may be genuine, without being authentic ; and a book may be authentic without being genuine. The books written by Richardson and Fielding are genuine books, though the histories of Clarissa and Tom Jones are fables. The history of the island of Formosa is a genuine book ; it was written by Pfalmanazar ; but it is not an authentic book, (though it was long esteemed as such, and translated into different languages,) for the au-

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thor,

thor, in the latter part of his life, took shame to himself for having imposed on the world, and confessed that it was a mere romance. Anson's Voyage may be considered as an authentic book, it, probably, containing a true narration of the principal events recorded in it ; but it is not a genuine book, having not been written by Walters, to whom it is ascribed, but by Robins.

This distinction between the genuineness and authenticity of a book, will assist us in detecting the fallacy of an argument, which you state with great confidence in the part of your work now under consideration, and which you frequently allude to, in other parts, as conclusive evidence against the truth of the Bible. Your argument stands thus—If it be found that the books ascribed to Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, were not written by Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, every part of the authority and authenticity of these books is gone at once. I presume to think otherwise. The genuineness of these books (in the judgment of those who say that they were written by these authors) will certainly be gone ; but their authenticity may remain ; they may still contain a true account of real transactions, though the names of the writers of them should be found to be different from what they are generally esteemed to be.

Had, indeed, Moses said that he wrote the five first books of the Bible ; and had Joshua and Samuel said that they wrote the books which are respectively attributed to them ; and had it been found that Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, did not write these books ; then, I grant, the
authority

authority of the whole would have been gone at once : these men would have been found liars, as to the genuineness of the books, and this proof of their want of veracity, in one point, would have invalidated their testimony in every other ; these books would have been justly stigmatized, as neither genuine nor authentic.

An history may be true, though it should not only be ascribed to a wrong author, but though the author of it should not be known ; anonymous testimony does not destroy the reality of facts, whether natural or miraculous. Had Lord Clarendon published his History of the Rebellion without prefixing his name to it ; or had the history of Titus Livius come down to us under the name of Valerius Flaccus, or Valerius Maximus ; the facts mentioned in these histories would have been equally certain.

As to your assertion, that the miracles recorded in Tacitus, and in other profane historians, are quite as well authenticated as those of the Bible—it, being a mere assertion destitute of proof, may be properly answered by a contrary assertion. I take the liberty then to say, that the evidence for the miracles recorded in the Bible is, both in kind and degree, so greatly superior to that for the prodigies mentioned by Livy, or the miracles related by Tacitus, as to justify us in giving credit to the one as the work of God, and in withholding it from the other as the effect of superstition and imposture. This method of derogating from the credibility of Christianity, by opposing to the miracles of our Saviour, the tricks of ancient impostors, seems to have originated with Hierocles in the fourth century ;

century ; and it has been adopted by unbelievers from that time to this ; with this difference, indeed, that the heathens of the third and fourth century admitted that Jesus wrought miracles ; but lest that admission should have compelled them to abandon their gods and become Christians, they said that their *Apollonius*, their *Apuleius*, their *Aristeas*, did as great : whilst modern deists deny the fact of Jesus having ever wrought a miracle. And they have some reason for this proceeding ; they are sensible that the gospel miracles are so different, in all their circumstances, from those related in Pagan story, that, if they admit them to have been performed, they must admit Christianity to be true ; hence they have fabricated a kind of deistical axiom—that no human testimony can establish the credibility of a miracle. This, though it has been an hundred times refuted, is still insisted upon, as if its truth had never been questioned, and could not be disproved.

You “ proceed to examine the authenticity of the Bible ; and you begin, you say, with what are called the five books of Moses, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Your intention, you profess, is to shew that these books are spurious, and that Moses is not the author of them ; and still farther, that they were not written in the time of Moses, nor till several hundred years afterwards ; that they are no other than an attempted history of the life of Moses, and of the times in which he is said to have lived, and also of the times prior thereto, written by some very ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, several hundred
years

years after the death of Moses." In this passage the utmost force of your attack on the authority of the five books of Moses is clearly stated. You are not the first who has started this difficulty; it is a difficulty, indeed, of modern date; having not been heard of, either in the synagogue, or out of it, till the twelfth century. About that time *Aben Ezra*, a Jew of great erudition, noticed some passages (the same that you have brought forward) in the five first books of the Bible, which he thought had not been written by Moses, but inserted by some person after the death of Moses. But he was far from maintaining, as you do, that these books were written by some ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, many hundred years after the death of Moses. *Hobbes* contends that the books of Moses are so called, not from their having been written by Moses, but from their containing an account of Moses. *Spinoza* supported the same opinion; and *Le Clerc*, a very able theological critic of the last and present century, once entertained the same notion. You see that this fancy has had some patrons before you; the merit or the demerit, the sagacity or the temerity of having asserted, that Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch, is not exclusively yours. *Le Clerc*, indeed, you must not boast of. When his judgment was matured by age, he was ashamed of what he had written on the subject in his younger years; he made a public recantation of his error, by annexing to his commentary on Genesis, a Latin dissertation—concerning Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, and his design in composing it. If in your future

ture life you should chance to change your opinion on the subject, it will be an honour to your character to emulate the integrity, and to imitate the example of *Le Clerc*. The Bible is not the only book which has undergone the fate of being reprobated as spurious, after it had been received as genuine and authentic for many ages. It has been maintained that the history of *Herodotus* was written in the time of *Constantine*; and that the Classics are forgeries of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. These extravagant reveries amused the world at the time of their publication, and have long since sunk into oblivion. You esteem all prophets to be such lying rascals, that I dare not venture to predict the fate of your book.

Before you produce your main objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you assert—"that there is no affirmative evidence that Moses is the author of them." What! no affirmative evidence? In the eleventh century *Maimonides* drew up a confession of faith for the Jews, which all of them at this day admit; it consists of only thirteen articles; and two of them have respect to Moses; one affirming the authenticity, the other the genuineness of his books. The doctrine and prophecy of Moses is true—The law that we have was given by Moses. This is the faith of the Jews at present, and has been their faith ever since the destruction of their city and temple; it was their faith in the time when the authors of the New Testament wrote; it was their faith during their captivity in Babylon; in the time of their kings and judges; and no period can be shewn, from
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the age of Moses to the present hour, in which it was not their faith. Is this no affirmative evidence? I cannot desire a stronger. *Josephus*, in his book against *Appion*, writes thus—"We have only two and twenty books which are to be believed as of divine authority, and which comprehend the history of all ages; five belong to Moses, which contain the original of man, and the tradition of the succession of generations, down to his death, which takes in a compass of about three thousand years." Do you consider this as no affirmative evidence? Why should I mention *Juvenal* speaking of the volume which Moses had written? Why enumerate a long list of profane authors, all bearing testimony to the fact of *Moses* being the leader and the lawgiver of the Jewish nation? and if a lawgiver, surely a writer of the laws. But what says the Bible? In *Exodus* it says—"Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people." In *Deuteronomy* it says—"And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, (this surely imports the finishing a laborious work,) that Moses commanded the Levites which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee." This is said in *Deuteronomy*, which is a kind of repetition or abridgment of the four preceding books; and it is well known that the Jews gave the name of the Law to the first five books of the Old

Old Testament. What possible doubt can there be that Moses wrote the books in question? I could accumulate many other passages from the scriptures to this purpose; but if what I have advanced will not convince you that there is affirmative evidence, and of the strongest kind, for Moses's being the author of these books, nothing that I can advance will convince you.

What if I should grant all you undertake to prove (the stupidity and ignorance of the writer excepted)?—What if I should admit, that *Samuel*, or *Ezra*, or some other learned Jew, composed these books, from public records, many years after the death of Moses? Will it follow, that there was no truth in them? According to my logic, it will only follow, that they are not genuine books; every fact recorded in them may be true, whenever, or by whomsoever they were written. It cannot be said that the Jews had no public records; the Bible furnishes abundance of proof to the contrary. I by no means admit, that these books, as to the main part of them, were not written by Moses; but I do contend, that a book may contain a true history, though we know not the author of it, or though we may be mistaken in ascribing it to a wrong author.

The first argument you produce against Moses being the author of these books is so old, that I do not know its original author; and it is so miserable an one, that I wonder you should adopt it—"These books cannot be written by Moses, because they are written in the third person; it is always, The Lord said unto Moses, or Moses said unto the Lord. This," you say,

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“is the style and manner that historians use, in speaking of the persons whose lives and actions they are writing.” This observation is true, but it does not extend far enough; for this is the style and manner not only of historians writing of other persons, but of eminent men, such as *Xenophon* and *Josephus*, writing of themselves. If General *Washington* should write the history of the American war, and should, from his great modesty, speak of himself in the third person, would you think it reasonable that, two or three thousand years hence, any person should, on that account, contend, that the history was not true? *Cæsar* writes of himself in the third person—it is always, *Cæsar* made a speech, or a speech was made to *Cæsar*, *Cæsar* crossed the Rhine, *Cæsar* invaded Britain; but every school-boy knows, that this circumstance cannot be adduced as a serious argument against *Cæsar*’s being the author of his own Commentaries.

But Moses, you urge, cannot be the author of the book of Numbers,—because he says of himself—“that Moses was a very meek man, above all the men that were on the face of the earth.” If he said this of himself, he was, you say, “a vain and arrogant coxcomb, (such is your phrase!) and unworthy of credit—and if he did not say it, the *books* are without authority.” This your dilemma is perfectly harmless; it has not an horn to hurt the weakest logician. If Moses did not write this little verse, if it was inserted by Samuel, or any of his countrymen, who knew his character and revered his memory, will it follow that he did

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not

not write any other part of the book of Numbers? Or if he did not write any part of the book of Numbers, will it follow that he did not write any of the other books of which he is usually reputed the author? And if he did write this of himself, he was justified by the occasion which extorted from him this commendation. Had this expression been written in a modern style and manner, it would probably have given you no offence. For who would be so fastidious as to find fault with an illustrious man, who, being calumniated by his nearest relations, as guilty of pride and fond of power, should vindicate his character by saying, My temper was naturally as meek and unassuming as that of any man upon earth? There are occasions, in which a modest man, who speaks truly, may speak proudly of himself, without forfeiting his general character; and there is no occasion, which either more requires, or more excuses this conduct, than when he is repelling the foul and envious aspersions of those who both knew his character and had experienced his kindness: and in that predicament stood *Aaron* and *Miriam*, the accusers of *Moses*. You yourself have, probably, felt the sting of calumny, and have been anxious to remove the impression. I do not call you a vain and arrogant coxcomb for vindicating your character, when in the latter part of this very work you boast, and I hope truly, “that the man does not exist that can say I have persecuted him, or any man, or any set of men, in the American revolution, or in the French revolution; or that I have in any case returned evil for

for evil." I know not what kings and priests may say to this ; you may not have returned to them evil for evil, because they never, I believe, did you any harm ; but you have done them all the harm you could, and that without provocation.

I think it needless to notice your observation upon what you call the dramatic style of Deuteronomy ; it is an ill-founded hypothesis. You might as well ask, where the author of Cæsar's Commentaries got the speeches of Cæsar, as where the author of Deuteronomy got the speeches of Moses. But your argument—that Moses was not the author of Deuteronomy, because the reason given in that book for the observation of the sabbath is different from that given in Exodus, merits a reply.

You need not be told that the very name of this book imports, in Greek, a repetition of a law ; and that the Hebrew doctors have called it by a word of the same meaning. In the fifth verse of the first chapter it is said in our Bibles, "Moses began to declare this law ;" but the Hebrew words, more properly translated, import that Moses "began, or determined, to explain the law." This is no shift of mine to get over a difficulty ; the words are so rendered in most of the ancient versions, and by *Fagius*, *Vetablus*, and *Le Clerc*, men eminently skilled in the Hebrew language. This repetition and explanation of the law, was a wise and benevolent proceeding in Moses ; that those who were either not born, or were mere infants, when it was first (forty years before) delivered in Horeb, might have an opportunity of knowing it ;
especially

especially as Moses their leader was soon to be taken from them, and they were about to be settled in the midst of nations given to idolatry and sunk in vice. Now where is the wonder, that some variations, and some additions, should be made to a law, when a legislator thinks fit to republish it many years after its first promulgation?

With respect to the sabbath, the learned are divided in opinion concerning its origin; some contending, that it was sanctified from the creation of the world; that it was observed by the patriarchs before the flood; that it was neglected by the Israelites during their bondage in Egypt; revived on the falling of manna in the wilderness; and enjoined, as a positive law, at mount Sinai. Others esteem its institution to have been no older than the age of Moses; and argue, that what is said of the sanctification of the sabbath in the book of Genesis, is said by way of anticipation. There may be truth in both these accounts. To me it is probable, that the memory of the creation was handed down from Adam to all his posterity; and that the seventh day was, for a long time, held sacred by all nations, in commemoration of that event; but that the peculiar rigidness of its observance was enjoined by Moses to the Israelites alone. As to there being two reasons given for its being kept holy,—one, that on that day God rested from the work of creation—the other, that on that day God had given them rest from the servitude of Egypt—I see no contradiction in the accounts. If a man, in writing the history of England, should inform his
readers,

readers, that the parliament had ordered the fifth of November to be kept holy, because on that day God had delivered the nation from a bloody-intended massacre by gunpowder; and if, in another part of his history, he should assign the deliverance of our church and nation from popery and arbitrary power, by the arrival of King William, as a reason for its being kept holy; would any one contend, that he was not justified in both these ways of expression, or that we ought from thence to conclude, that he was not the author of them both?

You think—"that law in Deuteronomy inhuman and brutal, which authorises parents, the father and the mother, to bring their own children to have them stoned to death for what it is pleased to call stubbornness." You are aware, I suppose, that paternal power, amongst the *Romans*, the *Gauls*, the *Persians*, and other nations, was of the most arbitrary kind; that it extended to the taking away the life of the child. I do not know whether the Israelites in the time of Moses exercised this paternal power; it was not a custom adopted by all nations, but it was by many; and in the infancy of society, before individual families had coalesced into communities, it was probably very general. Now Moses, by this law, which you esteem brutal and inhuman, hindered such an extravagant power from being either introduced or exercised amongst the Israelites. This law is so far from countenancing the arbitrary power of a father over the life of his child, that it takes from him the power of accusing the child before a magistrate—the father and the mother

of the child must agree in bringing the child to judgment—and it is not by their united will that the child was to be condemned to death ; the elders of the city were to judge whether the accusation was true ; and the accusation was to be not merely, as you insinuate, that the child was stubborn, but that he was “ stubborn and rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard.” Considered in this light, you must allow the law to have been an humane restriction of a power improper to be lodged with any parent.

That you may abuse the priests, you abandon your subject—“ Priests,” you say, “ preach up Deuteronomy, for Deuteronomy preaches up tythes.” I do not know that priests preach up Deuteronomy, more than they preach up other books of scripture ; but I do know that tythes are not preached up in Deuteronomy, more than in Leviticus, in Numbers, in Chronicles, in Malachi, in the law, the history, and the prophets of the Jewish nation. You go on—“ It is from this book, chap. xxv. ver. 4, they have taken the phrase, and applied it to tything, “ Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn ;” and that this might not escape observation, they have noted it in the table of contents at the head of the chapter, though it is only a single verse of less than two lines. O priests ! priests ! ye are willing to be compared to an ox for the sake of tythes !” I cannot call this—reasoning—and I will not pollute my page by giving it a proper appellation. Had the table of contents, instead of simply saying—the ox is not to be muzzled—said—tythes enjoined, or priests to be maintained—there would have

have been a little ground for your censure. Whoever noted this phrase at the head of the chapter, had better reason for doing it than you have attributed to them. They did it, because St. Paul had quoted it, when he was proving to the Corinthians, that they who preached the gospel had a right to live by the gospel ; it was Paul, and not the priests, who first applied this phrase to tything. St. Paul, indeed, did not avail himself of the right he contended for ; he was not, therefore, interested in what he said. The reason, on which he grounds the right, is not merely this quotation, which you ridicule ; nor the appointment of the law of Moses, which you think fabulous ; nor the injunction of Jesus, which you despise ; no, it is a reason founded in the nature of things, and which no philosopher, no unbeliever, no man of common sense can deny to be a solid reason ; it amounts to this—that “the labourer is worthy of his hire.” Nothing is so much a man’s own, as his labour and ingenuity ; and it is entirely consonant to the law of nature, that by the innocent use of these he should provide for his subsistence. Husbandmen, artists, soldiers, physicians, lawyers, all let out their labour and talents for a stipulated reward : why may not a priest do the same ? Some accounts of you have been published in England ; but, conceiving them to have proceeded from a design to injure your character, I never read them. I know nothing of your parentage, your education, or condition in life. You may have been elevated, by your birth, above the necessity of acquiring the means of sustaining life by the labour either of hand
or

or head: if this be the case, you ought not to despise those who have come into the world in less favourable circumstances. If your origin has been less fortunate, you must have supported yourself, either by manual labour, or the exercise of your genius. Why should you think that conduct disreputable in priests, which you probably consider as laudable in yourself? I know not whether you have not as great a dislike of kings as of priests: but that you may be induced to think more favourably of men of my profession, I will just mention to you that the payment of tythes is no new institution, but that they were paid in the most ancient times, not to priests only, but to kings. I could give you an hundred instances of this: two may be sufficient. *Abraham* paid tythes to the king of Salem, four hundred years before the law of Moses was given. The king of Salem was priest also of the most high God. Priests, you see, existed in the world, and were held in high estimation, for kings were priests, long before the impostures, as you esteem them, of the Jewish and Christian dispensations were heard of. But as this instance is taken from a book which you call "a book of contradictions and lies"—the Bible,—I will give you another, from a book, to the authority of which, as it is written by a profane author, you probably will not object. *Diogenes Laertius*, in his life of *Solon*, cites a letter of *Pisistratus* to that lawgiver, in which he says—"I Pisistratus, the tyrant, am contented with the stipends which were paid to those who reigned before me; the people of Athens set apart a *tenth* of the fruits of their land,

land, not for my private use, but to be expended in the public sacrifices, and for the general good."



Letter III.

S I R,

HAVING done with what you call the grammatical evidence that Moses was not the author of the books attributed to him, you come to your historical and chronological evidence; and you begin with Genesis. Your first argument is taken from the single word—Dan—being found in Genesis, when it appears from the book of Judges, that the town of Laish was not called Dan, till above three hundred and thirty years after the death of Moses; therefore the writer of Genesis, you conclude, must have lived after the town of Laish had the name of Dan given to it. Lest this objection should not be obvious enough to a common capacity, you illustrate it in the following manner: “Havre-de-Grace was called Havre-Marat in 1793; should then any dateless writing be found, in after times, with the name of Havre-Marat, it would be certain evidence that such a writing could not have been written till after the year 1793.” This is a wrong conclusion. Suppose some hot republican should at this day publish a new edition of any old history of France, and instead of Havre-de-Grace should write Havre-Marat; and that, two or three thousand

thousand years hence, a man, like yourself, should, on that account, reject the whole history as spurious, would he be justified in so doing? Would it not be reasonable to tell him, that the name Havre-Marat had been inserted, not by the original author of the history, but by a subsequent editor of it; and to refer him, for a proof of the genuineness of the book, to the testimony of the whole French nation? This supposition so obviously applies to your difficulty, that I cannot but recommend it to your impartial attention. But if this solution does not please you, I desire it may be proved, that the *Dan*, mentioned in Genesis, was the same town as the *Dan*, mentioned in Judges. I desire, further, to have it proved, that the *Dan*, mentioned in Genesis, was the name of a town, and not of a river. It is merely said—Abram pursued them, the enemies of Lot, to *Dan*. Now a river was full as likely as a town to stop a pursuit. *Lot*, we know, was settled in the plain of *Jordan*; and *Jordan*, we know, was composed of the united streams of two rivers, called *Jor* and *Dan*.

Your next difficulty respects its being said in Genesis—“These are the kings that reigned in *Edom* before there reigned any king over the children of Israel:—this passage could only have been written, you say (and I think you say rightly,) after the first king began to reign over Israel; so far from being written by Moses, it could not have been written till the time of Saul at the least.” I admit this inference, but I deny its application. A small addition to a book does not destroy either the genuineness or the

the authenticity of the whole book. I am not ignorant of the manner in which commentators have answered this objection of Spinoza, without making the concession which I have made ; but I have no scruple in admitting, that the passage in question, consisting of nine verses containing the genealogy of some kings of Edom, might have been inserted in the book of Genesis, after the book of Chronicles (which was called in Greek by a name importing that it contained things left out in other books) was written. The learned have shewn, that interpolations have happened to other books ; but these insertions by other hands have never been considered as invalidating the authority of those books.

“ Take away from Genesis,” you say, “ the belief that Moses was the author, on which only the strange belief that it is the Word of God has stood, and there remains nothing of Genesis but an anonymous book of stories, fables, traditionary or invented absurdities, or of downright lies.” What ! is it a story then, that the world had a beginning, and that the author of it was God ? If you deem this a story, I am not disputing with a deistical philosopher, but with an atheistic madman. Is it a story, that our first parents fell from a paradisiacal state—that this earth was destroyed by a deluge—that Noah and his family were preserved in the ark, and that the world has been re-peopled by his descendants ?—Look into a book so common that almost every body has it, and so excellent that no person ought to be without it—Grotius on the truth of the Christian religion—and you will

will there meet with abundant testimony to the truth of all the principal facts recorded in Genesis. The testimony is not that of Jews, Christians, and priests; it is the testimony of the philosophers, historians, and poets of antiquity. The oldest book in the world is Genesis; and it is remarkable that those books which come nearest to it in age, are those which make, either the most distinct mention of, or the most evident allusion to, the facts related in Genesis concerning the formation of the world from a chaotic mass, the primeval innocence and subsequent fall of man, the longevity of mankind in the first ages of the world, the depravity of the antediluvians, and the destruction of the world. Read the tenth chapter of Genesis. It may appear to you to contain nothing but an uninteresting narration of the descendants of *Shem*, *Ham*, and *Japheth*; a mere fable, an invented absurdity, a downright lie. No, Sir, it is one of the most valuable, and the most venerable records of antiquity. It explains what all profane historians were ignorant of—the origin of nations. Had it told us, as other books do, that one nation had sprung out of the earth they inhabited; another from a cricket or a grasshopper; another from an oak; another from a mushroom; another from a dragon's tooth; then indeed it would have merited the appellation you, with so much temerity, bestow upon it. Instead of these absurdities, it gives such an account of the peopling the earth after the deluge, as no other book in the world ever did give; and the truth of which all other books in the world, which contain any thing

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on the subject, confirm. The last verse of the chapter says—"These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations : and by these were the nations divided in the earth, after the flood." It would require great learning to trace out, precisely, either the actual situation of all the countries in which these founders of empires settled, or to ascertain the extent of their dominions. This, however, has been done by various authors, to the satisfaction of all competent judges ; so much at least to my satisfaction, that had I no other proof of the authenticity of Genesis, I should consider this as sufficient. But, without the aid of learning, any man who can barely read his Bible, and has but heard of such people as the *Affyrians*, the *Elamites*, the *Lydians*, the *Medes*, the *Ionians*, the *Thracians*, will readily acknowledge that they had *Affur*, and *Elam*, and *Lud*, and *Madai*, and *Javan*, and *Tiras*, grandsons of *Noah*, for their respective founders ; and knowing this, he will not, I hope, part with his Bible, as a system of fables. I am no enemy to philosophy ; but when philosophy would rob me of my Bible, I must say of it, as Cicero said of the twelve tables,—This little book alone exceeds the libraries of all the philosophers in the weight of its authority, and in the extent of its utility.

From the abuse of the Bible, you proceed to that of Moses, and again bring forward the subject of his wars in the land of Canaan. There are many men who look upon all war (would to God that all men saw it in the same light!) with extreme abhorrence, as afflicting mankind

with calamities not necessary, shocking to humanity, and repugnant to reason. But is it repugnant to reason that God should, by an express act of his providence, destroy a wicked nation? I am fond of considering the goodness of God as the leading principle of his conduct towards mankind, of considering his justice as subservient to his mercy. He punishes individuals and nations with the rod of his wrath; but I am persuaded that all his punishments originate in his abhorrence of sin; are calculated to lessen its influence; and are proofs of his goodness; inasmuch as it may not be possible for Omnipotence itself to communicate supreme happiness to the human race, whilst they continue servants of sin. The destruction of the Canaanites exhibits to all nations, in all ages, a signal proof of God's displeasure against sin; it has been to others, and it is to ourselves, a benevolent warning. Moses would have been the wretch you represent him, had he acted by his own authority alone: but you may as reasonably attribute cruelty and murder to the judge of the land in condemning criminals to death, as butchery and massacre to Moses in executing the command of God.

The Midianites, through the counsel of Balaam, and by the vicious instrumentality of their women, had seduced a part of the Israelites to idolatry; to the impure worship of their infamous god Baalpeor: for this offence, twenty-four thousand Israelites had perished in a plague from heaven, and Moses received a command from God "to smite the Midianites who had beguiled the people. An army was equipped, and sent

sent against Midian. When the army returned victorious, Moses and the princes of the congregation went to meet it; "and Moses was wroth with the officers." He observed the women captives, and he asked with astonishment, "Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation." He then gave an order that the boys and the women should be put to death, but that the young maidens should be kept alive for themselves. I see nothing in this proceeding, but good policy, combined with mercy. The young men might have become dangerous avengers of, what they would esteem, their country's wrongs; the mothers might have again allured the Israelites to the love of licentious pleasures and the practice of idolatry, and brought another plague upon the congregation; but the young maidens, not being polluted by the flagitious habits of their mothers, nor likely to create disturbance by rebellion, were kept alive. You give a different turn to the matter; you say—"that thirty-two thousand women-children were consigned to debauchery by the order of Moses." Prove this, and I will allow that Moses was the horrid monster you make him—prove this, and I will allow that the Bible is what you call it—a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy"—prove this, or excuse my warmth if I say to you, as Paul said to Elymas the sorcerer, who sought to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith, "O full of all subtilty, and all mischief, thou child

child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" I did not, when I began these letters, think that I should have been moved to this severity of rebuke, by any thing you could have written; but when so gross a misrepresentation is made of God's proceedings, coolness would be a crime. The women-children were not reserved for the purposes of debauchery, but of slavery;—a custom abhorrent from our manners, but every where practised in former times, and still practised in countries where the benignity of the Christian religion has not softened the ferocity of human nature. You here admit a part of the account given in the Bible respecting the expedition against Midian to be a true account: it is not unreasonable to desire that you will admit the whole, or shew sufficient reason why you admit one part, and reject the other. I will mention the part to which you have paid no attention. The Israelitish army consisted but of twelve thousand men, a mere handful when opposed to the people of Midian; yet, when the officers made a muster of their troops after their return from the war, they found that they had not lost a single man! This circumstance struck them as so decisive an evidence of God's interposition, that out of the spoils they had taken they offered "an oblation to the Lord, an atonement for their souls." Do but believe what the captains of thousands, and the captains of hundreds, believed at the time when these things happened, and we shall never more hear of your objections to the Bible, from its account of the wars of Moses.

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You produce two or three other objections respecting the genuineness of the first five books of the Bible. I cannot stop to notice them : every commentator answers them in a manner suited to the apprehension of even a mere English reader. You calculate, to the thousandth part of an inch, the length of the iron bed of Og the king of Basan ; but you do not prove that the bed was too big for the body, or that a Patagonian would have been lost in it. You make no allowance for the size of a royal bed ; nor even suspect that king Og might have been possessed with the same kind of vanity, which occupied the mind of king Alexander, when he ordered his soldiers to enlarge the size of their beds, that they might give to the Indians, in succeeding ages, a great idea of the prodigious stature of a Macedonian. In many parts of your work you speak much in commendation of science. I join with you in every commendation you can give it : but you speak of it in such a manner as gives room to believe, that you are a great proficient in it ; if this be the case, I would recommend a problem to your attention, the solution of which you will readily allow to be far above the powers of a man conversant only, as you represent priests and bishops to be, in *hic, hæc, hoc*. The problem is this—To determine the height to which a human body, preserving its similarity of figure, may be augmented, before it will perish by its own weight. When you have solved this problem, we shall know whether the bed of the king of Basan was too big for any giant ; whether the existence of a man twelve or fifteen feet high is

in the nature of things impossible. My philosophy teaches me to doubt of many things ; but it does not teach me to reject every testimony which is opposite to my experience: had I been born in Shetland, I could, on proper testimony, have believed in the existence of the Lincolnshire ox, or of the largest dray-horse in London ; though the oxen and horses in Shetland had not been bigger than mastiffs.



Letter IV.

S I R,

HAVING finished your objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you proceed to your remarks on the book of Joshua ; and from its internal evidence you endeavour to prove, that this book was not written by Joshua. What then ? what is your conclusion ? “ that it is anonymous and without authority.” Stop a little ; your conclusion is not connected with your premises ; your friend Euclid would have been ashamed of it. “ Anonymous, and therefore without authority !” I have noticed this solecism before ; but as you frequently bring it forward, and, indeed, your book stands much in need of it, I will submit to your consideration another observation on the subject — The book called Fleta is anonymous ; but it is not on that account without authority. Domesday book is anonymous, and was written above seven hundred years ago, yet our courts
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of law do not hold it to be without authority, as to the matters of fact related in it. Yes, you will say, but this book has been preserved with singular care amongst the records of the nation. And who told you that the Jews had no records, or that they did not preserve them with singular care? Josephus says the contrary : and, in the Bible itself, an appeal is made to many books, which have perished ; such as the book of Jasher, the book of Nathan, of Abijah, of Iddo, of Jehu, of natural history by Solomon, of the acts of Manasseh, and others which might be mentioned. If any one, having access to the journals of the lords and commons, to the books of the treasury, war-office, privy council, and other public documents, should at this day write an history of the reigns of George the first and second, and should publish it without his name, would any man, three or four hundreds or thousands of years hence, question the authority of that book, when he knew that the whole British nation had received it as an authentic book, from the time of its first publication to the age in which he lived? This supposition is in point. The books of the Old Testament were composed from the records of the Jewish nation, and they have been received as true by that nation, from the time in which they were written to the present day. Doddsley's Annual Register is an anonymous book ; we only know the name of its editor ; the New Annual Register is an anonymous book ; the Reviews are anonymous books ; but do we, or will our posterity, esteem these books as of no authority? On the contrary, they are admitted at present, and will be received

ceived in after ages, as authoritative records of the civil, military, and literary history of England and of Europe. So little foundation is there for our being startled by your assertion, "It is anonymous and without authority."

If I am right in this reasoning, (and I protest to you that I do not see any error in it,) all the arguments you adduce in proof that the book of Joshua was not written by Joshua, nor that of Samuel by Samuel, are nothing to the purpose for which you have brought them forward: these books may be books of authority, though all you advance against the genuineness of them should be granted. No article of faith is injured by allowing that there is no such positive proof, when or by whom these, and some other books of holy scripture, were written, as to exclude all possibility of doubt and cavil. There is no necessity, indeed, to allow this. The chronological and historical difficulties, which others before you have produced, have been answered, and as to the greatest part of them, so well answered, that I will not waste the reader's time by entering into a particular examination of them.

You make yourself merry with what you call the tale of the sun standing still upon mount Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon; and you say that "the story detects itself, because there is not a nation in the world that knows any thing about it." How can you expect that there should, when there is not a nation in the world whose annals reach this era by many hundred years? It happens, however, that you are probably mistaken as to the fact: a confused tradition concerning this miracle, and
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a similar one in the time of Ahaz, when the sun went back ten degrees, has been preserved amongst one of the most ancient nations, as we are informed by one of the most ancient historians. Herodotus, in his *Euterpe*, speaking of the Egyptian priests, says—"They told me that the sun had four times deviated from his course, having twice risen where he uniformly goes down, and twice gone down where he uniformly rises. This however had produced no alteration in the climate of Egypt; the fruits of the earth and the phenomena of the Nile had always been the same." (Beloe's Transl.) The last part of this observation confirms the conjecture, that this account of the Egyptian priests had a reference to the two miracles respecting the sun mentioned in scripture; for they were not of that kind, which could introduce any change in climates or seasons. You would have been contented to admit the account of this miracle as a fine piece of poetical imagery;—you may have seen some Jewish doctors, and some Christian commentators, who consider it as such; but, improperly, in my opinion. I think it idle, at least, if not impious, to undertake to explain how the miracle was performed; but one who is not able to explain the mode of doing a thing, argues ill if he thence infers that the thing was not done. We are perfectly ignorant how the sun was formed, how the planets were projected at the creation, how they are still retained in their orbits by the power of gravity; but we admit, notwithstanding, that the sun was formed, that the planets were then projected, and that they are still retained in their orbits. The machine of
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the universe is in the hand of God ; he can stop the motion of any part or of the whole of it, with less trouble and less danger of injuring it, than you can stop your watch. In testimony of the reality of the miracle, the author of the book says—"Is not this written in the book of Jasher?" No author in his senses would have appealed, in proof of his veracity, to a book which did not exist, or in attestation of a fact which, though it did exist, was not recorded in it ; we may safely therefore conclude, that, at the time the book of Joshua was written, there was such a book as the book of Jasher, and that the miracle of the sun's standing still was recorded in that book. But this observation, you will say, does not prove the fact of the sun's having stood still. I have not produced it as a proof of that fact ; but it proves that the author of the book of Joshua believed the fact, and that the people of Israel admitted the authority of the book of Jasher. An appeal to a fabulous book would have been as senseless an insult upon their understanding, as it would have been upon ours, had Rapin appealed to the Arabian Nights' Entertainment, as a proof of the battle of Hastings.

I cannot attribute much weight to your argument against the genuineness of the book of Joshua, from its being said that—"Joshua burned Ai, and made it an heap forever, even a desolation unto *this day*." Joshua lived twenty-four years after the burning of Ai : and if he wrote his history in the latter part of his life, what absurdity is there in saying, Ai is still in ruins, or Ai is in ruins to this very day ? A young man, who had seen the heads of the rebels,

els, in forty-five, when they were first stuck upon poles at Temple-Bar, might, twenty years afterwards, in attestation of his veracity in speaking of the fact, have justly said—And they are there to this very day. Whoever wrote the gospel of St. Matthew, it was written not many centuries, probably (I had almost said certainly) not a quarter of one century after the death of Jesus; yet the author, speaking of the potter's field which had been purchased by the chief priests with the money they had given Judas to betray his Master, says that it was therefore called the field of blood *unto this day*; and in another place he says, that the story of the body of Jesus being stolen out of the sepulchre was commonly reported among the Jews *until this day*. Moses, in his old age, had made use of a similar expression, when he put the Israelites in mind of what the Lord had done to the Egyptians in the Red Sea, “The Lord hath destroyed them unto this day.” (Deut. xi. 4.)

In the last chapter of the book of Joshua it is related, that Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel to Shechem; and there, in the presence of the elders and the principal men of Israel, he recapitulated, in a short speech, all that God had done for their nation, from the calling of Abraham to that time, when they were settled in the land which God had promised to their forefathers. In finishing his speech, he said to them—“Choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve

serve the Lord. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods." Joshua urged farther, that God would not suffer them to worship other gods in fellowship with him; they answered, that "they would serve the Lord." Joshua then said to them, "Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses." Here was a solemn covenant between Joshua, on the part of the Lord, and all the men of Israel on their own part. The text then says—"So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem, *and Joshua wrote these words in the book of the Law of God.*" Here is a proof of two things—first, that there was then, a few years after the death of Moses, existing a book called The Book of the Law of God; the same, without doubt, which Moses had written, and committed to the custody of the Levites, that it might be kept in the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it might be a witness against them—secondly, that Joshua *wrote* a part at least of his own transactions in that very book, as an addition to it. It is not a proof that he wrote all his own transactions in any book; but I submit entirely to the judgment of every candid man, whether this proof of his having recorded a very material transaction, does not make it probable that he recorded other material transactions; that he wrote the chief part of the book of Joshua; and that such things as happened after his death, have been inserted in it by others, in order to render the history more complete. The

The book of Joshua, chap. vi. ver. 26, is quoted in the first book of Kings, chap. xvi. ver. 44. "In his (Ahab's) days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun." Here is a proof that the book of Joshua is older than the first book of Kings: but that is not all which may reasonably be inferred, I do not say proved, from this quotation. It may be inferred from the phrase—According to the word of the Lord which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun—that Joshua *wrote down* the word which the Lord had spoken. In Baruch (which, though an apocryphal book, is authority for this purpose) there is a similar phrase—As thou spakest by thy servant Moses in the day when thou didst command him *to write thy law*.

I think it unnecessary to make any observation on what you say relative to the book of Judges; but I cannot pass unnoticed your censure of the book of Ruth, which you call "an idle bungling story, foolishly told, no body knows by whom, about a strolling country girl creeping slyly to bed to her cousin Boaz; pretty stuff, indeed," you exclaim, "to be called the Word of God!" It seems to me that you do not perfectly comprehend what is meant by the expression—the Word of God—or the divine authority of the scriptures: I will explain it to you in the words of Dr. Law, late Bishop of Carlisle, and in those of St. Austin. My first quotation is from Bishop Law's Theory of Religion,

ligion, a book not undeserving your notice. "The true sense then of the *divine authority* of the books of the Old Testament, and which perhaps is enough to denominate them in general *divinely inspired*, seems to be this; that as in those times God has all along, beside the inspection, or superintendency of his general providence, interfered upon particular occasions, by giving express commissions to some persons (thence called *prophets*) to declare his will in various manners, and degrees of evidence, as best suited the occasion, time, and nature of the subject; and in all other cases, left them wholly to themselves: in like manner, he has interposed his more immediate assistance, (and notified it to them, as they did to the world,) in the *recording* of these revelations; so far as that was necessary, amidst the common (but from hence termed *sacred*) history of those times; and mixed with various other occurrences; in which the historian's own natural qualifications were sufficient to enable him to relate things, with all the accuracy they required." The passage from St. Austin is this—"I am of opinion, that those men to whom the Holy Ghost revealed what ought to be received as authoritative in religion, might write some things as men with historical diligence, and other things as prophets by divine inspiration; and that these things are so distinct, that the former may be attributed to themselves as contributing to the increase of knowledge, and the latter to God speaking by them things appertaining to the authority of religion." Whether this opinion be right or wrong, I do not here inquire; it is the opinion
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of many learned men and good Christians : and, if you will adopt it as your opinion, you will see cause, perhaps, to become a Christian yourself; you will see cause to consider chronological, geographical, or genealogical errors—apparent mistakes or real contradictions as to historical facts—needless repetitions and trifling interpolations—indeed you will see cause to consider all the principal objections of your book to be absolutely without foundation. Receive but the Bible as composed by upright and well informed, though in some points, fallible men, (for I exclude all fallibility when they profess to deliver the Word of God,) and you must receive it as a book revealing to you, in many parts, the express will of God; and in other parts, relating to you the ordinary history of the times. Give but the authors of the Bible that credit which you give to other historians; believe them to deliver the Word of God, when they tell you that they do so; believe, when they relate other things as of themselves and not of the Lord, that they wrote to the best of their knowledge and capacity; and you will be in your belief something very different from a deist: you may not be allowed to aspire to the character of an orthodox believer, but you will not be an unbeliever in the divine authority of the Bible; though you should admit human mistakes and human opinions to exist in some parts of it. This I take to be the first step towards the removal of the doubts of many sceptical men; and when they are advanced thus far, the grace of God, assisting a teachable disposition, and a pious intention, may carry them on to perfection.

As to Ruth, you do an injury to her character. She was not a strolling country girl. She had been married ten years; and being left a widow without children, she accompanied her mother-in-law, returning into her native country, out of which with her husband and her two sons she had been driven by a famine. The disturbances in France have driven many men with their families to America: if, ten years hence, a woman, having lost her husband and her children, should return to France with a daughter-in-law, would you be justified in calling the daughter-in-law a strolling country-girl? But she “crept slyly to bed to her cousin Boaz.” I do not find it so in the history—as a person imploring protection, she laid herself down at the foot of an aged kinsman’s bed, and she rose up with as much innocence as she had laid herself down. She was afterwards married to Boaz, and reputed by all her neighbours a virtuous woman; and they were more likely to know her character than you are. Whoever reads the book of Ruth, bearing in mind the simplicity of ancient manners, will find it an interesting story of a poor young woman, following in a strange land the advice, and affectionately attaching herself to the fortunes of the mother of her deceased husband.

The two books of Samuel come next under your review. You proceed to shew that these books were not written by Samuel, that they are anonymous, and thence you conclude without authority. I need not here repeat what I have said upon the fallacy of your conclusion; and as to your proving that the books were not

written

written by Samuel, you might have spared yourself some trouble if you had recollected, that it is generally admitted that Samuel did not write any part of the second book which bears his name, and only a part of the first. It would, indeed, have been an inquiry not undeserving your notice, in many parts of your work, to have examined what was the opinion of learned men respecting the authors of the several books of the Bible ; you would have found, that you were in many places fighting a phantom of your own raising, and proving what was generally admitted. Very little certainty, I think, can at this time be obtained on this subject : but that you may have some knowledge of what has been conjectured by men of judgment, I will quote to you a passage from Dr. Hartley's observations on man. The author himself does not vouch for the truth of his observation, for he begins it with a supposition. “ I suppose then, that the Pentateuch consists of the writings of *Moses*, put together by *Samuel*, with a very few additions ; that the books of *Joshua* and *Judges* were, in like manner, collected by him ; and the book of *Ruth*, with the first part of the first book of *Samuel*, written by him ; that the latter part of the first book of *Samuel*, and the second book, were written by the prophets who succeeded *Samuel*, suppose *Nathan* and *Gad* ; that the books of *Kings* and *Chronicles* are extracts from the records of the succeeding prophets, concerning their own times, and from the public genealogical tables made by *Ezra* ; that the books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* are collections of like records, some written by *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*,

and some by their predecessors ; that the book of Esther was written by some eminent Jew, in or near the times of the transaction there recorded, perhaps *Mordecai* ; the book of Job by a Jew, of an uncertain time ; the Psalms by *David*, and other pious persons ; the books of Proverbs and Canticles by *Solomon* ; the book of Ecclesiastes by *Solomon*, or perhaps by a Jew of later times, speaking in his person, but not with an intention to make him pass for the author ; the prophecies by the prophets whose names they bear ; and the books of the New Testament by the persons to whom they are usually ascribed.” I have produced this passage to you not merely to shew you that, in a great part of your work, you are attacking what no person is interested in defending ; but to convince you, that a wise and good man, and a firm believer in revealed religion, for such was Dr. Hartley, and no priest, did not reject the anonymous books of the Old Testament as books without authority. I shall not trouble either you or myself with any more observations on that head ; you may ascribe the two books of Kings, and the two books of Chronicles, to what authors you please ; I am satisfied with knowing, that the annals of the Jewish nation were written in the time of Samuel, and, probably, in all succeeding times, by men of ability, who lived in or near the times of which they write. Of the truth of this observation we have abundant proof, not only from the testimony of Josephus, and of the writers of the Talmuds, but from the Old Testament itself. I will content myself with citing a few places—“ Now the acts of David the king, first and

and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer.”

1 Chron. xxix. 29. “Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer?” 2 Chron. ix. 29.

“Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer, concerning genealogies?” 2 Chron. xii. 15. “Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani.” 2 Chron. xx. 34. Is it possible for writers to give a stronger evidence of their veracity, than by referring their readers to the books from which they had extracted the materials of their history?

“The two books of Kings,” you say, “are little more than an history of assassinations, treachery, and war.” That the kings of Israel and Judah were many of them very wicked persons, is evident from the history which is given of them in the Bible; but it ought to be remembered, that their wickedness is not to be attributed to their religion; nor were the people of Israel chosen to be the people of God, on account of their wickedness; nor was their being chosen, a cause of it. One may wonder, indeed, that, having experienced so many singular marks of God’s goodness towards their nation, they did not at once become, and continue to be (what, however, they have long been) strenuous advocates for the worship of one only God,

God, the maker of heaven and earth. This was the purpose for which they were chosen, and this purpose has been accomplished. For above three and twenty hundred years the Jews have uniformly witnessed to all the nations of the earth the unity of God, and his abomination of idolatry. But as you look upon "the appellation of the Jews being God's *chosen* people as a *lie* which the priests and leaders of the Jews had invented to cover the baseness of their own characters, and which Christian priests, sometimes as corrupt, and often as cruel, have professed to believe," I will plainly state to you the reasons which induce me to believe that it is no *lie*, and I hope they will be such reasons as you will not attribute either to cruelty or corruption.

To any one contemplating the universality of things, and the fabric of nature, this globe of earth, with the men dwelling on its surface, will not appear (exclusive of the divinity of their souls) of more importance than an hillock of ants ; all of which, some with corn, some with eggs, some without any thing, run hither and thither, bustling about a little heap of dust. This is a thought of the immortal Bacon ; and it is admirably fitted to humble the pride of philosophy, attempting to prescribe forms to the proceedings, and bounds to the attributes of God. We may as easily circumscribe infinity, as penetrate the secret purposes of the Almighty. There are but two ways by which I can acquire any knowledge of the nature of the Supreme Being,—by reason and by revelation ; to you, who reject revelation, there is but one. Now
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my reason informs me, that God has made a great difference between the kinds of animals, with respect to their capacity of enjoying happiness. Every kind is perfect in its order ; but if we compare different kinds together, one will appear to be greatly superior to another. An animal, which has but one sense, has but one source of happiness ; but if it be supplied with what is suited to that sense, it enjoys all the happiness of which it is capable, and is in its nature perfect. Other sorts of animals, which have two or three senses, and which have also abundant means of gratifying them, enjoy twice or thrice as much happiness as those do which have but one. In the same sort of animals there is a great difference amongst individuals, one having the senses more perfect, and the body less subject to disease, than another. Hence, if I were to form a judgment of the divine goodness by this use of my reason, I could not but say that it was partial and unequal. "What shall we say then ? is God unjust ? God forbid !" His goodness may be unequal, without being imperfect ; it must be estimated from the whole, and not from a part. Every order of beings is so sufficient for its own happiness, and so conducive at the same time to the happiness of every other, that in one view it seems to be made for itself alone, and in another not for itself but for every other. Could we comprehend the whole of the immense fabric which God hath formed, I am persuaded that we should see nothing but perfection, harmony, and beauty, in every part of it ; but whilst we dispute about parts, we neglect the whole, and discern nothing

ing but supposed anomalies and defects. The maker of a watch, or the builder of a ship, is not to be blamed because a spectator cannot discover either the beauty or the use of disjointed parts. And shall we dare to accuse God of injustice, for not having distributed the gifts of nature in the same degree to all kinds of animals, when it is probable that this very inequality of distribution may be the mean of producing the greatest sum total of happiness to the whole system? In exactly the same manner may we reason concerning the acts of God's especial providence. If we consider any one act, such as that of appointing the Jews to be his peculiar people, as unconnected with every other, it may appear to be a partial display of his goodness; it may excite doubts concerning the wisdom or the benignity of his divine nature. But if we connect the history of the Jews with that of other nations, from the most remote antiquity to the present time, we shall discover that they were not chosen so much for their own benefit, or on account of their own merit, as for the general benefit of mankind. To the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Grecians, Romans, to all the people of the earth, they were formerly, and they are still to all civilized nations, a beacon set upon an hill, to warn them from idolatry, to light them to the sanctuary of a God holy, just, and good. Why should we suspect such a dispensation of being a *lie*? when even from the little which we can understand of it, we see that it is founded in wisdom, carried on for the general good, and analogous to all that reason teaches us concerning the nature of God.

Several

Several things you observe are mentioned in the book of the Kings, such as the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, the ascent of Elijah into heaven, the destruction of the children who mocked Elisha, and the resurrection of a dead man: these circumstances being mentioned in the book of Kings, and not mentioned in that of Chronicles, is a proof to you that they are lies. I esteem it a very erroneous mode of reasoning, which, from the silence of one author concerning a particular circumstance, infers the want of veracity in another who mentions it. And this observation is still more cogent, when applied to a book which is only a supplement to, or an abridgment of, other books: and under this description the book of Chronicles has been considered by all writers. But though you will not believe the miracle of the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, what can you say to the prophecy which was then delivered concerning the future destruction of the idolatrous altar of Jeroboam? The prophecy is thus written, 1 Kings xiii. 2. "Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee (the altar) shall he offer the priests of the high places." Here is a clear prophecy; the name, family, and office of a particular person are described in the year 975 (according to the Bible chronology) before Christ. Above 350 years after the delivery of the prophecy, you will find, by consulting the second book of Kings, (chap. xxiii. 15, 16) this prophecy fulfilled in all its parts.

You make a calculation that Genesis was not written till 800 years after Moses, and that it is
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of the same age, and you may probably think of the same authority, as *Æsop's Fables*. You give, what you call the evidence of this, the air of a demonstration—"It has but two stages:—first, the account of the kings of Edom, mentioned in *Genesis*, is taken from *Chronicles*, and therefore the book of *Genesis* was written after the book of *Chronicles*:—secondly, the book of *Chronicles* was not begun to be written till after *Zedekiah*, in whose time *Nebuchadnezzar* conquered *Jerusalem*, 588 years before *Christ*, and more than 860 after *Moses*." Having answered this objection before, I might be excused taking any more notice of it; but as you build much, in this place, upon the strength of your argument, I will shew you its weakness, when it is properly stated. A few verses in the book of *Genesis* could not be written by *Moses*; therefore no part of *Genesis* could be written by *Moses*:—a child would deny your *therefore*.—Again, a few verses in the book of *Genesis* could not be written by *Moses*, because they speak of kings of *Israel*, there having been no kings of *Israel* in the time of *Moses*; and therefore they could not be written by *Samuel*, or by *Solomon*, or by any other person who lived after there were kings in *Israel*, except by the author of the book of *Chronicles*:—this is also an illegitimate inference from your position. Again, a few verses in the book of *Genesis* are, word for word, the same as a few verses in the book of *Chronicles*; therefore the author of the book of *Genesis* must have taken them from *Chronicles*:—another lame conclusion! Why might not the author of the book of *Chronicles* have taken

taken them from Genesis, as he has taken many other genealogies, supposing them to have been inserted in Genesis by Samuel? But where, you may ask, could Samuel, or any other person, have found the account of the kings of Edom? Probably, in the public records of the nation, which were certainly as open for inspection to Samuel, and the other prophets, as they were to the author of Chronicles. I hold it needless to employ more time on the subject.



Letter V.

S I R,

AT length you come to two books, Ezra and Nehemiah, which you allow to be genuine books, giving an account of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, about 536 years before Christ; but then you say, "Those accounts are nothing to us, nor to any other persons, unless it be to the Jews, as a part of the history of their nation; and there is just as much of the Word of God in those books, as there is in any of the histories of France, or in Rapin's history of England." Here let us stop a moment, and try if from your own concessions it be not possible to confute your argument. Ezra and Nehemiah, you grant, are genuine books—"but they are nothing to us!" The very first verse of Ezra says—The prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled: Is it nothing to us to know that Jeremiah was a true prophet?

prophet? Do but grant that the Supreme Being communicated to any of the sons of men a knowledge of future events, so that their predictions were plainly verified, and you will find little difficulty in admitting the truth of revealed religion. Is it nothing to us to know that, five hundred and thirty-six years before Christ, the books of Chronicles, Kings, Judges, Joshua, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus, Exodus, Genesis, every book the authority of which you have attacked, are all referred to by Ezra and Nehemiah, as authentic books, containing the history of the Israelitish nation from Abraham to that very time? Is it nothing to us to know that the history of the Jews is true?—It is every thing to us; for if that history be not true, Christianity must be false. The Jews are the root, we are branches “grafted in amongst them:” to them pertain “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

The history of the Old Testament has, without doubt, some difficulties in it; but a minute philosopher, who busies himself in searching them out, whilst he neglects to contemplate the harmony of all its parts, the wisdom and goodness of God displayed throughout the whole, appears to me to be like a purblind man, who, in surveying a picture, objects to the simplicity of the design, and the beauty of the execution, from the asperities he has discovered in the canvass and the colouring. The history of the
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Old Testament, notwithstanding the real difficulties which occur in it, notwithstanding the scoffs and cavils of unbelievers, appears to me to have such internal evidences of its truth, to be so corroborated by the most ancient profane histories, so confirmed by the present circumstances of the world, that if I were not a Christian, I would become a Jew. You think this history to be a collection of lies, contradictions, blasphemies: I look upon it to be the oldest, the truest, the most comprehensive, and the most important history in the world. I consider it as giving more satisfactory proofs of the being and attributes of God, of the origin and end of human kind, than ever were attained by the deepest researches of the most enlightened philosophers. The exercise of our reason in the investigation of truth respecting the nature of God, and the future expectations of human kind, is highly useful; but I hope I shall be pardoned by the metaphysicians in saying, that the chief utility of such disquisitions consists in this—that they bring us acquainted with the weakness of our intellectual faculties. I do not presume to measure other men by my standard; you may have clearer notions than I am able to form of the infinity of space; of the eternity of duration; of necessary existence; of the connexion between necessary existence and intelligence, between intelligence and benevolence: you may see nothing in the universe but organized matter; or, rejecting a material, you may see nothing but an ideal world. With a mind weary of conjecture, fatigued by doubt, sick of disputation, eager for knowledge, anxious

ious for certainty, and unable to attain it by the best use of my reason in matters of the utmost importance, I have long ago turned my thoughts to an impartial examination of the proofs on which revealed religion is grounded, and I am convinced of its truth. This examination is a subject within the reach of human capacity ; you have come to one conclusion respecting it, I have come to another ; both of us cannot be right ; may God forgive him that is in an error !

You ridicule, in a note, the story of an angel appearing to Joshua. Your mirth you will perceive to be misplaced, when you consider the design of this appearance ; it was to assure Joshua, that the same God who had appeared to Moses, ordering him to pull off his shoes, because he stood on holy ground, had now appeared to himself. Was this no encouragement to a man who was about to engage in war with many nations ? Had it no tendency to confirm his faith ? Was it no lesson to him to obey, in all things, the commands of God, and to give the glory of his conquests to the author of them, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ? As to your wit about pulling off the shoe, it originates, I think, in your ignorance ; you ought to have known, that this rite was an indication of reverence for the divine presence ; and that the custom of entering barefoot into their temples subsists, in some countries, to this day.

You allow the book of Ezra to be a genuine book : but that the author of it may not escape without a blow, you say, that in matters of record

ord it is not to be depended on ; and as a proof of your assertion, you tell us that the total amount of the numbers who returned from Babylon does not correspond with the particulars ; and that every child may have an argument for its infidelity, you display the particulars ; and shew your own skill in arithmetic by summing them up. And can you suppose that Ezra, a man of great learning, knew so little of science, so little of the lowest branch of science, that he could not give his readers the sum total of sixty particular sums ? You know, undoubtedly, that the Hebrew letters denoted also numbers ; and that there was such a great similarity between some of these letters, that it was extremely easy for a transcriber of a manuscript to mistake a $\beth$ for a $\daleth$ (or 2 for 20), a $\lamed$ for a $\mem$ (or 3 for 50), a $\dalet$ for a $\dalet$ (or 5 for 200). Now what have we to do with numerical contradictions in the Bible, but to attribute them, wherever they occur, to this obvious source of error—the inattention of the transcriber in writing one letter for another that was like it ?

I should extend these letters to a length troublesome to the reader, to you, and to myself, if I answered minutely every objection you have made, and rectified every error into which you have fallen ; it may be sufficient briefly to notice some of the chief. The character represented in Job under the name of Satan is, you say, “ the first and the only time this name is mentioned in the Bible.” Now I find this name, as denoting an enemy, frequently occurring in the Old Testament ; thus 2 Sam. xix. 22. “ What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah,

ruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me?" In the original it is satans unto me. Again, 1 Kings v. 4. "The Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary, nor evil occurrent"—in the original, neither satan nor evil. I need not mention other places; these are sufficient to shew, that the word satan, denoting an adversary, does occur in various places of the Old Testament; and it is extremely probable to me, that the root satan was introduced into the Hebrew and other eastern languages, to denote an adversary, from its having been the proper name of the great enemy of mankind. I know it is an opinion of Voltaire, that the word satan is not older than the Babylonian captivity; this is a mistake, for it is met with in the hundred and ninth psalm, which all allow to have been written by David, long before the captivity.

Now we are upon this subject, permit me to recommend to your consideration the universality of the doctrine concerning an evil being, who in the beginning of time had opposed himself, who still continues to oppose himself, to the supreme source of all good. Amongst all nations, in all ages, this opinion prevailed, that human affairs were subject to the will of the gods, and regulated by their interposition. Hence has been derived whatever we have read of the wandering stars of the Chaldeans, two of them beneficent, and two malignant—hence the Egyptian *Typho* and *Osiris*—the Persian *Arimanius* and *Oromasdes*—the Grecian *celestial* and *infernal Jove*—the *Brama* and the *Zupay* of the Indians, Peruvians, Mexicans—the good and evil

evil principle, by whatever names they may be called, of all other barbarous nations—and hence the structure of the whole book of Job, in whatever light, of history or drama, it be considered. Now, does it not appear reasonable to suppose, that an opinion so ancient and so universal has arisen from tradition concerning the fall of our first parents; disfigured, indeed, and obscured, as all traditions must be, by many fabulous additions?

The Jews, you tell us, “never prayed but when they were in trouble.” I do not believe this of the Jews; but that they prayed more fervently when they were in trouble than at other times, may be true of the Jews, and I apprehend is true of all nations and all individuals. But “the Jews never prayed for any thing but victory, vengeance, and riches.” Read Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple, and blush for your assertion,—illiberal and uncharitable in the extreme!

“It appears,” you observe, “to have been the custom of the heathens to personify both virtue and vice, by statues and images, as is done now-a-days both by statuary and by painting; but it does not follow from this that they worshipped them any more than we do.” Not worshipped them! What think you of the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar set up? Was it not worshipped by the princes, the rulers, the judges, the people, the nations, and the languages of the Babylonian empire? Not worshipped them! What think you of the decree of the Roman senate for fetching the statue of the mother of the gods from Pessinum? Was it only

only that they might admire it as a piece of workmanship? Not worshipped them! "What man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians was a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?" Not worshipped them!—The worship was universal: "Every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places, which the Samaritans had made—the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avites made Nibhas and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in fire to Adrammelech, and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim." (2 Kings, chap. xvii.) The heathens are much indebted to you for this your curious apology for their idolatry; for a mode of worship the most cruel; senseless, impure, abominable, that can possibly disgrace the faculties of the human mind. Had this your conceit occurred in ancient times, it might have saved *Micah's teraphims*, the *golden calves of Jeroboam*, and of *Aaron*, and quite superseded the necessity of the second commandment!!! Heathen morality has had its advocates before you; the facetious gentleman who pulled off his hat to the statue of Jupiter, that he might have a friend when heathen idolatry should again be in repute, seems to have had some foundation for his improper humour, some knowledge that certain men esteeming themselves great philosophers had entered into a conspiracy to abolish Christianity, some foresight of the consequences which will certainly attend their success.

It is an error, you say, to call the Psalms—the Psalms of David. This error was observed by St. Jerome, many hundred years before you were born; his words are—“We know that they are in an error who attribute all the Psalms to David.” You, I suppose, will not deny, that David wrote some of them. Songs are of various sorts; we have hunting songs, drinking songs, fighting songs, love songs, foolish, wanton, wicked songs: if you will have the “Psalms of David to be nothing but a collection from different song-writers,” you must allow that the writers of them were inspired by no ordinary spirit; that it is a collection, incapable of being degraded by the name you give it; that it greatly excels every other collection in matter and in manner. Compare the book of Psalms with the odes of Horace or Anacreon, with the hymns of Callimachus, the golden verses of Pythagoras, the choruses of the Greek tragedians, (no contemptible compositions any of these,) and you will quickly see how greatly it surpasses them all, in piety of sentiment, in sublimity of expression, in purity of morality, and in rational theology.

As you esteem the Psalms of David a song book, it is consistent enough in you to esteem the Proverbs of Solomon a jest book; there have not come down to us above eight hundred of his jests; if we had the whole three thousand, which he wrote, our mirth would be extreme. Let us open the book, and see what kind of jests it contains; take the very first as a specimen—“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom

dom and instruction." Do you perceive any jest in this ? The fear of the Lord ! What Lord does Solomon mean ? He means that Lord who took the posterity of Abraham to be his peculiar people—who redeemed that people from Egyptian bondage by a miraculous interposition of his power—who gave the law to Moses—who commanded the Israelites to exterminate the nations of Canaan. Now this Lord you will not fear ; the jest says, you despise wisdom and instruction. Let us try again—" My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." If your heart has been ever touched by parental feelings, you will see no jest in this. Once more—" My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." These are the three first proverbs in Solomon's " jest book ;" if you read it through, it may not make you merry ; I hope it will make you wise ; that it will teach you, at least, the beginning of wisdom—the fear of that Lord whom Solomon feared. Solomon, you tell us, was witty ; jesters are sometimes witty ; but though all the world, from the time of the queen of Sheba, has heard of the wisdom of Solomon, his wit was never heard of before. There is a great difference, Mr. Locke teaches us, between wit and judgment, and there is a greater between wit and wisdom. Solomon " was wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol." These men you may think were jesters ; and so may you call the seven wise men of Greece : but you will never convince the world that Solomon, who was wiser than them
all.

all, was nothing but a witty jester. As to the sins and debaucheries of Solomon, we have nothing to do with them but to avoid them; and to give full credit to his experience, when he preaches to us his admirable sermon on the vanity of every thing but piety and virtue.

Isaiah has a greater share of your abuse than any other writer in the Old Testament, and the reason of it is obvious—the prophecies of Isaiah have received such a full and circumstantial completion, that, unless you can persuade yourself to consider the whole book (a few historical sketches excepted) “as one continued bombastical rant, full of extravagant metaphor, without application, and destitute of meaning,” you must of necessity allow its divine authority. You compare the burden of Babylon, the burden of Moab, the burden of Damascus, and the other denunciations of the prophet against cities and kingdoms, to “the story of the knight of the burning mountain, the story of Cinderilla, &c.” I may have read these stories, but I remember nothing of the subjects of them; I have read also Isaiah’s burden of Babylon, and I have compared it with the past and present state of Babylon, and the comparison has made such an impression on my mind, that it will never be effaced from my memory. I shall never cease to believe, that the Eternal alone, by whom things future are more distinctly known than past or present things are by man, that the eternal God alone could have dictated to the prophet Isaiah the subject of the burden of Babylon.

The latter part of the forty-fourth, and the beginning

beginning of the forty-fifth chapters of *Isaiah*, are, in your opinion, so far from being written by *Isaiah*, that they could only have been written by some person who lived at least an hundred and fifty years after *Isaiah* was dead :— These chapters, you go on, “ are a compliment to *Cyrus*, who permitted the Jews to return to *Jerusalem* from the *Babylonian* captivity above one hundred and fifty years after the death of *Isaiah* :”—and is it for this, Sir, that you accuse the church of audacity and the priests of ignorance, in imposing, as you call it, this book upon the world as the writing of *Isaiah*? What shall be said of you, who, either designedly or ignorantly, represent one of the most clear and important prophecies in the Bible, as an historical compliment, written above an hundred and fifty years after the death of the prophet? We contend, Sir, that this is a prophecy and not an history; that God called *Cyrus* by his name; declared that he should conquer *Babylon*; and described the means by which he should do it, above an hundred years before *Cyrus* was born, and when there was no probability of such an event. *Porphry* could not resist the evidence of *Daniel's* prophecies, but by saying, that they were forged after the events predicted had taken place; *Voltaire* could not resist the evidence of the prediction of *Jesus*, concerning the destruction of *Jerusalem* but by saying, that the account was written after *Jerusalem* had been destroyed; and you, at length, (though, for aught I know, you may have had predecessors in this presumption,) unable to resist the evidence of *Isaiah's* prophecies, contend that they are bombastical

bombastical rant, without application, though the application is circumstantial; and destitute of meaning, though the meaning is so obvious that it cannot be mistaken; and that one of the most remarkable of them is not a prophecy, but an historical compliment written after the event. We will not, Sir, give up Daniel and St. Matthew to the impudent assertions of Porphyry and Voltaire, nor will we give up Isaiah to your assertion. Proof, proof is what we require, and not assertion: we will not relinquish our religion, in obedience to your abusive assertion respecting the prophets of God. That the wonderful absurdity of this hypothesis may be more obvious to you, I beg you to consider that Cyrus was a Persian, had been brought up in the religion of his country, and was probably addicted to the magian superstition of two independent beings, equal in power but different in principle, one the author of light and of all good, the other the author of darkness and all evil. Now is it probable that a captive Jew, meaning to compliment the greatest prince in the world, should be so stupid as to tell the prince that his religion was a lie? "I am the Lord, and there is none else, I form the *light* and create *darkness*, I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all these things."

But if you will persevere in believing that the prophecy concerning Cyrus was written after the event, peruse the burden of Babylon; was that also written after the event? Were the Medes *then* stirred up against Babylon? Was Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees, *then* overthrown, and become as Sodom and Gomorrah? Was it

then uninhabited? Was it *then* neither fit for the Arabian's tent nor the shepherd's fold? Did the wild beasts of the desert *then* lie there? Did the wild beasts of the islands *then* cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces? Were Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, the son and the grandson, *then* cut off? Was Babylon *then* become a possession of the bittern, and pools of water? Was it *then* swept with the besom of destruction, so swept that the world knows not where to find it?

I am unwilling to attribute bad designs, deliberate wickedness, to you, or to any man; I cannot avoid believing, that you think you have truth on your side, and that you are doing service to mankind in endeavouring to root out what you esteem superstition. What I blame you for is this—that you have attempted to lessen the authority of the Bible by ridicule, more than by reason; that you have brought forward every petty objection which your ingenuity could discover, or your industry pick up, from the writings of others; and without taking any notice of the answers which have been repeatedly given to these objections, you urge and enforce them as if they were new. There is certainly some novelty, at least in your manner, for you go beyond all others in boldness of assertion, and in profaneness of argumentation; Bolingbroke and Voltaire must yield the palm of scurrility to Thomas Paine.

Permit me to state to you, what would, in my opinion, have been a better mode of proceeding; better suited to the character of an honest man, sincere in his endeavours to search out truth. Such a man, in reading the Bible, would,

would, in the first place, examine whether the Bible attributed to the Supreme Being any attributes repugnant to holiness; truth, justice, goodness; whether it represented him as subject to human infirmities; whether it excluded him from the government of the world, or assigned the origin of it to chance, and an eternal conflict of atoms. Finding nothing of this kind in the Bible, (for the destruction of the Canaanites by his express command, I have shewn not to be repugnant to his moral justice,) he would, in the second place, consider that the Bible being, as to many of its parts, a very old book, and written by various authors, and at different and distant periods, there might, probably, occur some difficulties and apparent contradictions in the historical part of it; he would endeavour to remove these difficulties, to reconcile these apparent contradictions, by the rules of such sound criticism as he would use in examining the contents of any other book; and if he found that most of them were of a trifling nature, arising from short additions inserted into the text as explanatory and supplemental, or from mistakes and omissions of transcribers, he would infer that all the rest were capable of being accounted for, though he was not able to do it; and he would be the more willing to make this concession, from observing, that there ran through the whole book an harmony and connexion, utterly inconsistent with every idea of forgery and deceit. He would then, in the third place, observe, that the miraculous and historical parts of this book were so intermixed, that they could not be separated; that they must either both be true, or both false; and
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from finding that the historical part was as well or better authenticated than that of any other history, he would admit the miraculous part ; and to confirm himself in this belief, he would advert to the prophecies ; well knowing that the prediction of things to come, was as certain a proof of the divine interposition, as the performance of a miracle could be. If he should find, as he certainly would, that many ancient prophecies had been fulfilled in all their circumstances, and that some were fulfilling at this very day, he would not suffer a few seeming or real difficulties to overbalance the weight of this accumulated evidence for the truth of the Bible. Such, I presume to think, would be a proper conduct in all those who are desirous of forming a rational and impartial judgment on the subject of revealed religion. To return.—

As to your observation, that the book of Isaiah is (at least in translation) that kind of composition and false taste, which is properly called prose run mad—I have only to remark, that your taste for Hebrew poetry, even judging of it from translation, would be more correct if you would suffer yourself to be informed on the subject by Bishop Lowth, who tells you in his *Prelections*—“ that a poem translated literally from the Hebrew into any other language, whilst the same forms of the sentences remain, will still retain, even as far as relates to versification, much of its native dignity, and a faint appearance of versification.” (Gregory’s Transl.) If this is what you mean by prose run mad, your observation may be admitted.

You explain at some length your notion of the misapplication made by St. Matthew of the
prophecy

prophecy in Isaiah—"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." That passage has been handled largely and minutely by almost every commentator, and it is too important to be handled superficially by any one: I am not on the present occasion concerned to explain it. It is quoted by you to prove, and it is the only instance you produce—that Isaiah was "a lying prophet and an impostor." Now I maintain, that this very instance proves, that he was a true prophet, and no impostor. The history of the prophecy, as delivered in the seventh chapter, is this—Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah king of Israel, made war upon Ahaz king of Judah; not merely, or, perhaps, not at all, for the sake of plunder or the conquest of territory, but with a declared purpose of making an entire revolution in the government of Judah, of destroying the royal house of David, and of placing another family on the throne. Their purpose is thus expressed—"Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal." Now what did the Lord commission Isaiah to say to Ahaz? Did he commission him to say, the kings shall not vex thee? No. The kings shall not conquer thee? No. The kings shall not succeed against thee? No. He commissioned him to say, "It (the purpose of the two kings) shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass." I demand—Did it stand, did it come to pass? Was any revolution effected? Was the royal house of David dethroned and destroyed? Was Tabeal ever made king of Judah? No. The prophecy was perfectly accomplished. You say,

“ Instead of these two kings failing in their attempt against Ahaz, they succeeded; Ahaz was defeated and destroyed.” I deny the fact; Ahaz was defeated, but not destroyed; and even the “ two hundred thousand women, and sons, and daughters,” whom you represent as carried into captivity, were not carried into captivity; they were made captives, but they were not carried into captivity; for the chief men of Samaria, being admonished by a prophet, would not suffer Pekah to bring the captives into the land—“ They rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses (some humanity, you see, amongst those Israelites, whom you every where represent as barbarous brutes,) and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm-trees, to their brethren.” 2 Chron. xxviii. 15. The kings did fail in their attempt; their attempt was to destroy the house of David, and to make a revolution; but they made no revolution, they did not destroy the house of David, for Ahaz slept with his fathers; and Hezekiah, his son, of the house of David, reigned in his stead.



Letter VI.

S I R,

AFTER what I conceive to be a great misrepresentation of the character and conduct of Jeremiah, you bring forward an objection

jection which Spinoza and others before you had much insisted upon, though it is an objection which neither affects the genuineness, nor the authenticity, of the book of Jeremiah, any more than the blunder of a bookbinder, in misplacing the sheets of your performance, would lessen its authority. The objection is, that the book of Jeremiah has been put together in a disordered state. It is acknowledged, that the order of time is not every where observed; but the cause of the confusion is not known. Some attribute it to *Baruch* collecting into one volume all the several prophecies which Jeremiah had written, and neglecting to put them in their proper places:—others think that the several parts of the work were at first properly arranged, but that through accident, or the carelessness of transcribers, they were deranged:—others contend, that there is no confusion; that prophecy differs from history, in not being subject to an accurate observance of time and order. But leaving this matter to be settled by critical discussion, let us come to a matter of greater importance—to your charge against Jeremiah for his duplicity, and for his false prediction. First, as to his duplicity:

Jeremiah, on account of his having boldly predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, had been thrust into a miry dungeon by the princes of Judah who sought his life; there he would have perished, had not one of the eunuchs taken compassion on him, and petitioned king Zedekiah in his favour, saying, “These men (the princes) have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, (no small testimony this, of the probity of the prophet’s character,)”

after,) whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is like to die for hunger." On this representation Jeremiah was taken out of the dungeon by an order from the king, who soon afterwards sent privately for him, and desired him to conceal nothing from him, binding himself, by an oath, that, whatever might be the nature of his prophecy, he would not put him to death, or deliver him into the hands of the princes who sought his life. Jeremiah delivered to him the purpose of God respecting the fate of Jerusalem. The conference being ended, the king, anxious to perform his oath, to preserve the life of the prophet, dismissed him, saying, "Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die. But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; also what the king said unto thee: then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there. Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him, and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded." Thus, you remark, "this man of God, as he is called, could tell a lie, or very strongly prevaricate; for certainly he did not go to Zedekiah to make his supplication, neither did he make it." It is not said that he told the princes he *went* to make his supplication, but that he *presented* it: now it is said in the preceding chapter, that he did make the supplication, and it is probable that in this conference he renewed it; but be
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that as it may, I contend that Jeremiah was not guilty of duplicity, or, in more intelligible terms, that he did not violate any law of nature, or of civil society, in what he did on this occasion. He told the truth, in part, to save his life; and he was under no obligation to tell the whole to men who were certainly his enemies, and no good subjects to his king. "In a matter (says Puffendorf) which I am not *obliged* to declare to another, if I cannot, with safety, conceal the whole, I may fairly discover no more than a part." Was Jeremiah under any *obligation* to declare to the princes what had passed in his conference with the king? You may as well say, that the house of lords has a right to compel privy counsellors to reveal the king's secrets. The king cannot justly require a privy counsellor to tell a lie for him; but he may require him not to divulge his *counsels* to those who have no right to know them. Now for the false prediction—I will give the description of it in your own words.

"In the 34th chapter is a prophecy of Jeremiah to Zedekiah; in these words, ver. 2.—
 'Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and will burn it with fire; and thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but thou shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon. Yet hear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah, king of Judah; thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not die by the sword, but thou shalt die in peace; and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings that were before thee,

thee, so shall they burn odours for thee, and will lament thee, saying, Ah, Lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the Lord.'

“Now, instead of Zedekiah beholding the eyes of the king of Babylon, and speaking with him mouth to mouth, and dying in peace, and with the burnings of odours, as at the funeral of his fathers (as Jeremiah had declared the Lord himself had pronounced) the reverse, according to the 52d chapter, was the case; it is there stated, verse 10, ‘That the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.’ What can we say of these prophets, but that they are impostors and liars?” I can say this—that the prophecy you have produced, was fulfilled in all its parts: and what then shall be said of those who call Jeremiah a liar and an impostor? Here then we are fairly at issue—you affirm that the prophecy was not fulfilled, and I affirm that it was fulfilled in all its parts. “I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire:” so says the prophet; what says the history? “They (the forces of the king of Babylon) burnt the house of God, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire.” (2 Chron. xxxvi. 19.) “Thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand:” so says the prophet; what says the history? “The men of war fled by night, and the king went the way towards the plain, and the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of
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of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him; so they *took* the king, and *brought him up to the king of Babylon*, to Riblah." (2 Kings xxv. 5.) The prophet goes on, "Thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth." No pleasant circumstance this to Zedekiah, who had provoked the king of Babylon by revolting from him! The history says, "The king of Babylon gave judgment upon Zedekiah," or, as it is more literally rendered from the Hebrew, "*spake judgments with him* at Riblah." The prophet concludes this part with, "And thou shalt go to Babylon:" the history says, "The king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death." (Jer. liii. 11.) "Thou shalt not die by the sword." He did not die by the sword, he did not fall in battle. "But thou shalt die in peace." He did die in peace, he neither expired on the rack, or on the scaffold; was neither strangled nor poisoned; no unusual fate of captive kings! he died peaceably in his bed, though that bed was in a prison. "And with the burnings of thy fathers shall they burn odours for thee." I cannot prove from the history that this part of the prophecy was accomplished, nor can you prove that it was not. The probability is, that it was accomplished; and I have two reasons on which I ground this probability. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, to say nothing of other Jews, were men of great authority in the court of the king of Babylon, before and after the commencement of the imprisonment of Zedekiah; and Daniel continued in power till the subversion

subversion of the kingdom of Babylon by Cyrus. Now it seems to me to be very probable, that Daniel, and the other great men of the Jews, would both have inclination to request, and influence enough with the king of Babylon to obtain, permission to bury their deceased prince Zedekiah, after the manner of his fathers. But if there had been no Jews at Babylon of consequence enough to make such a request, still it is probable that the king of Babylon would have ordered the Jews to bury and lament their departed prince, after the manner of their country. Monarchs, like other men, are conscious of the instability of human condition; and when the pomp of war has ceased, when the insolence of conquest is abated, and the fury of resentment subsided, they seldom fail to revere royalty even in its ruins, and grant without reluctance proper obsequies to the remains of captive kings.

You profess to have been particular in treating of the books ascribed to Isaiah and Jeremiah. Particular! in what? You have particularized two or three passages, which you have endeavoured to represent as objectionable, and which I hope have been shewn, to the reader's satisfaction, to be not justly liable to your censure; and you have passed over all the other parts of these books without notice. Had you been particular in your examination, you would have found cause to admire the probity and the intrepidity of the characters of the authors of them; you would have met with many instances of sublime composition, and, what is of more consequence, with many instances of prophetic veracity :—particularities of these kinds you have

have wholly overlooked. I cannot account for this ; I have no right, no inclination, to call you a dishonest man : am I justified in considering you as a man not altogether destitute of ingenuity, but so entirely under the dominion of prejudice in every thing respecting the Bible, that, like a corrupted judge previously determined to give sentence on one side, you are negligent in the examination of truth ?

You proceed to the rest of the prophets, and you take them collectively, carefully however selecting for your observations such particularities as are best calculated to render, if possible, the prophets odious or ridiculous in the eyes of your readers. You confound prophets with poets and musicians : I would distinguish them thus ; many prophets were poets and musicians, but all poets and musicians were not prophets. Prophecies were often delivered in poetic language and measure ; but flights and metaphors of the Jewish poets have not, as you affirm, been foolishly erected into what are now called prophecies—they are now called, and have always been called, prophecies,—because they were real predictions, some of which have received, some are now receiving, and all will receive, their full accomplishment.

That there were false prophets, witches, necromancers, conjurers, fortune-tellers, among the Jews, no person will attempt to deny ; no nation, barbarous or civilized, has been without them : but when you would degrade the prophets of the Old Testament to a level with these conjuring, dreaming, strolling gentry—when you would represent them as spending their lives in fortune-telling, casting nativities, predicting

predicting riches, fortunate or unfortunate marriages, conjuring for lost goods, &c. I must be allowed to say, that you wholly mistake their office, and misrepresent their character: their office was to convey to the children of Israel the commands, the promises, the threatenings of Almighty God; and their character was that of men sustaining, with fortitude, persecution in the discharge of their duty. There were false prophets in abundance amongst the Jews; and if you oppose these to the true prophets, and call them both party prophets, you have the liberty of doing so, but you will not thereby confound the distinction between truth and falsehood. False prophets are spoken of with detestation in many parts of scripture, particularly by Jeremiah, who accuses them of prophesying lies in the name of the Lord, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed:—behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith; that prophesy false dreams, and cause my people to err by their lies and by their lightness." Jeremiah cautions his countrymen against giving credit to their prophets, to their diviners, to their dreamers, to their enchanters, to their forcerers, "which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon." You cannot think more contemptibly of these gentry, than they were thought of by the true prophets at the time they lived; but, as Jeremiah says on this subject, "what is the chaff to the wheat?" what are the false prophets to the true ones? Every thing good is liable to abuse; but who argues against the use of a thing from the abuse of it? against physicians, because there

there are pretenders to physic? Was Isaiah a fortune-teller, predicting riches, when he said to king Hezekiah, "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Fortune-tellers generally predict good luck to their simple customers, that they may make something by their trade; but Isaiah predicts to a monarch desolation of his country, and ruin of his family. This prophecy was spoken in the year before Christ 713; and, above an hundred years afterwards, it was accomplished; when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, and carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, (2 Kings xxiv. 13.) and when he commanded the master of his eunuchs, (Dan. i. 3.) that he should take certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes, and educate them for three years, till they were able to stand before the king.

Jehoram king of Israel, Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and the king of Edom, going with their armies to make war on the king of Moab, came into a place where there was no water either for their men or cattle. In this distress they waited upon Elisha, (an high honour for one of your conjurers,) by the advice of Jehoshaphat, who knew that the word of the Lord was with him. The prophet, on seeing Jehoram, an idolatrous prince, who had revolted from
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the worship of the true God, come to consult him, said to him,—“Get thee to the prophets of thy father and the prophets of thy mother.” This you think shews Elisha to have been a party prophet, full of venom and vulgarity—it shews him to have been a man of great courage, who respected the dignity of his own character, the sacredness of his office as a prophet of God, whose duty it was to reprove the wickedness of kings, as of other men. He ordered them to make the valley where they were full of ditches :—this, you say, “every countryman could have told, that the way to get water was to dig for it :”—but this is not a true representation of the case ; the ditches were not dug that water might be gotten by digging for it, but that they might hold the water when it should miraculously come, “without wind or rain,” from another country ; and it did come “from the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water.” As to Elisha’s cursing the little children who had mocked him, and their destruction in consequence of his imprecation, the whole story must be taken together. The provocation he received is, by some, considered as an insult offered to him, not as a man but as a prophet, and that the persons who offered it were not what we understand by little children, but grown-up youths ; the term child being applied, in the Hebrew language, to grown-up persons. Be this as it may, the cursing was the act of the prophet ; had it been a sin, it would not have been followed by a miraculous destruction of the offenders ; for this was the act of God, who best knows who deserves punishment. What effect such a signal judgment had

had on the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, is no where said ; but it is probable it was not without a good effect.

Ezekiel and Daniel lived during the Babylonian captivity ; you allow their writings to be genuine. In this you differ from some of the greatest adversaries of Christianity ; and in my opinion cut up, by this concession, the very root of your whole performance. It is next to an impossibility for any man, who admits the book of Daniel to be a genuine book, and who examines that book with intelligence and impartiality, to refuse his assent to the truth of Christianity. As to your saying, that the interpretations which commentators and priests have made of these books, only shew the fraud, or the extreme folly, to which credulity and priestcraft can go ; I consider it as nothing but a proof of the extreme folly or fraud to which prejudice and infidelity can carry a minute philosopher. You profess a fondness for science ; I will refer you to a scientific man, who was neither a commentator nor a priest,—to Ferguson. In a tract entitled—*The Year of our Saviour's Crucifixion ascertained ; and the darkness, at the time of his crucifixion, proved to be supernatural*—this real philosopher interprets the remarkable prophecy in the 9th chapter of Daniel, and concludes his dissertation in the following words—“ Thus we have an astronomical demonstration of the truth of this ancient prophecy, seeing that the prophetic year of the Messiah's being cut off, was the very same with the astronomical.” I have somewhere read an account of a solemn disputation which was held at Venice, in the last century, between a Jew and a

Christian :—the Christian strongly argued from Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks, that Jesus was the Messiah whom the Jews had long expected, from the predictions of their prophets: the learned Rabbi, who presided at this disputation, was so forcibly struck by the argument, that he put an end to the business, by saying—“ Let us shut up our Bibles ; for if we proceed in the examination of this prophecy, it will make us all become Christians.” Was it a similar apprehension which deterred you from so much as opening the book of Daniel ? You have not produced from it one exceptionable passage. I hope you will read that book with attention, with intelligence, and with an unbiassed mind follow the advice of our Saviour when he quoted this very prophecy—“ Let him that readeth understand”—and I shall not despair of your conversion from Deism to Christianity.

In order to discredit the authority of the books which you allow to be genuine, you form a strange and prodigious hypothesis concerning Ezekiel and Daniel, for which there is no manner of foundation either in history or probability. You suppose these two men to have had no dreams, no visions, no revelation from God Almighty; but to have pretended to these things; and, under that disguise, to have carried on an enigmatical correspondence relative to the recovery of their country from the Babylonian yoke. That any man in his senses should frame or adopt such an hypothesis, should have so little regard to his own reputation as an impartial inquirer after truth, so little respect for the understanding of his readers, as to obtrude it on
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the world, would have appeared an incredible circumstance, had not you made it a fact.

You quote a passage from Ezekiel ; in the 29th chapter, ver. 11, speaking of Egypt, it is said, " No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years : "—this, you say, " never came to pass, and consequently it is false, as all the books I have already reviewed are."

Now that this did come to pass, we have, as Bishop Newton observes, " the testimonies of Megasthenes and Berofus, two heathen historians, who lived about 300 years before Christ ; one of whom affirms, expressly, that Nebuchadnezzar conquered the greater part of Africa ; and the other affirms it, in effect, in saying, that when Nebuchadnezzar heard of the death of his father, having settled his affairs *in Egypt*, and committed the *captives* whom he took in Egypt to the care of some of his friends to bring them after him, he hastened directly to Babylon." And if we had been possessed of no testimony in support of the prophecy, it would have been an hasty conclusion, that the prophecy never came to pass ; the history of Egypt, at so remote a period, being no where accurately and circumstantially related. I admit that no period can be pointed out from the age of Ezekiel to the present, in which there was no foot of man or beast to be seen for forty years in all Egypt ; but some think that only a part of Egypt is here spoken of ; and surely you do not expect a literal accomplishment of an hyperbolical expression, denoting great desolation ; importing that the trade of Egypt, which was carried on then, as at present, by caravans, by the foot of man and
beast,

beast, should be annihilated. Had you taken the trouble to have looked a little farther into the book from which you have made your quotation, you would have there seen a prophecy delivered above two thousand years ago, and which has been fulfilling from that time to this —“ Egypt shall be the basest of the kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations—there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt.” This you may call a dream, a vision, a lie: I esteem it a wonderful prophecy; for “as is the prophecy, so has been the event. Egypt was conquered by the Babylonians; and after the Babylonians by the Persians; and after the Persians it became subject to the Macedonians; and after the Macedonians to the Romans; and after the Romans to the Saracens; and then to the Mamalucs; and is now a province of the Turkish empire.”

Suffer me to produce to you from this author not an enigmatical letter to Daniel respecting the recovery of Jerusalem from the hands of the king of Babylon, but an enigmatical prophecy concerning Zedekiah the king of Jerusalem, before it was taken by the Chaldeans. “I will bring him (Zedekiah) to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not *see* it though he shall die there.” How! not see Babylon, when he should die there! How, moreover, is this consistent, you may ask, with what Jeremiah had foretold—that Zedekiah should see the eyes of the king of Babylon? This darkness of expression, and apparent contradiction between the two prophets, induced Zedekiah (as Josephus informs us) to give no credit to either of them; yet he unhappily experienced, and the fact

fact is worthy your observation, the truth of them both. He saw the eyes of the king of Babylon, not at Babylon, but at Riblah; his eyes were there put out; and he was carried to Babylon, yet he saw it not: and thus were the predictions of both the prophets verified, and the enigma of Ezekiel explained.

As to your wonderful discovery that the prophecy of Jonah is a book of some Gentile, "and that it has been written as a fable, to expose the nonsense, and to satirize the vicious and malignant character of a Bible-prophet, or a predicting priest," I shall put it, covered with *bellebore*, for the service of its author, on the same shelf with your hypothesis concerning the conspiracy of Daniel and Ezekiel, and shall not say another word about it.

You conclude your objections to the Old Testament in a triumphant style; an angry opponent would say, in a style of extreme arrogance, and sottish self-sufficiency. "I have gone," you say, "through the Bible (mistaking here, as in other places, the Old Testament for the Bible) as a man would go through a wood, with an axe on his shoulders, and fell trees; here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never grow." And is it possible that you should think so highly of your performance, as to believe, that you have thereby demolished the authority of a book, which Newton himself esteemed the most authentic of all histories; which, by its celestial light, illumines the darkest ages of antiquity; which is the touchstone whereby we are enabled to distinguish between true and fabulous theology,

ogy, between the God of Israel, holy, just, and good, and the impure rabble of heathen Baalim ; which has been thought, by competent judges, to have afforded matter for the laws of Solon, and a foundation for the philosophy of Plato ; which has been illustrated by the labour of learning, in all ages and countries ; and been admired and venerated for its piety, its sublimity, its veracity, by all who were able to read and understand it ? No, Sir ; you have gone indeed through the wood, with the best intention in the world to cut it down ; but you have merely busied yourself in exposing to vulgar contempt a few unsightly shrubs, which good men had wisely concealed from public view ; you have entangled yourself in thickets of thorns and briars ; you have lost your way on the mountains of Lebanon ; the goodly cedar trees whereof, lamenting the madness, and pitying the blindness of your rage against them, have scorned the blunt edge and the base temper of your axe, and laughed unhurt at the feebleness of your stroke.

In plain language, you have gone through the Old Testament hunting after difficulties, and you have found some real ones ; these you have endeavoured to magnify into insurmountable objections to the authority of the whole book. When it is considered that the Old Testament is composed of several books, written by different authors, and at different periods, from Moses to Malachi, comprising an abstracted history of a particular nation for above a thousand years, I think the real difficulties which occur in it are much fewer, and of much less importance, than could reasonably have been expected.

Apparent

Apparent difficulties you have represented as real ones, without hinting at the manner in which they have been explained. You have ridiculed things held most sacred, and calumniated characters esteemed most venerable ; you have excited the scoffs of the profane ; increased the scepticism of the doubtful ; shaken the faith of the unlearned ; suggested cavils to the “ disputers of this world ;” and perplexed the minds of honest men who wish to worship the God of their fathers in sincerity and truth. This and more you have done in going through the Old Testament ; but you have not so much as glanced at the great design of the whole, at the harmony and mutual dependence of the several parts. You have said nothing of the wisdom of God in selecting a particular people from the rest of mankind, not for their own sakes, but that they might witness to the whole world, in successive ages, his existence and attributes ; that they might be an instrument of subverting idolatry, of declaring the name of the God of Israel throughout the whole earth. It was through this nation that the Egyptians saw the wonders of God ; that the Canaanites (whom wickedness had made a reproach to human nature) felt his judgments ; that the Babylonians issued their decrees—“ That none should dare to speak amiss of the God of Israel—that all should fear and tremble before him :”—and it is through them that you and I, and all the world, are not at this day worshippers of idols. You have said nothing of the goodness of God in promising, that, through the seed of Abraham, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed ; that the Desire of all nations, the blessing

ing of Abraham to the Gentiles, should come. You have passed by all the prophecies respecting the coming of the Messiah ; though they absolutely fixed the time of his coming, and of his being cut off ; described his office, character, condition, sufferings, and death, in so circumstantial a manner, that we cannot but be astonished at the accuracy of their completion in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. You have neglected noticing the testimony of the whole Jewish nation to the truth both of the natural and miraculous facts recorded in the Old Testament. That we may better judge of the weight of this testimony, let us suppose that God should now manifest himself to us, as we contend he did to the Israelites in Egypt, in the desert, and in the land of Canaan ; and that he should continue these manifestations of himself to our posterity for a thousand years or more, punishing or rewarding them according as they disobeyed or obeyed his commands ; what would you expect should be the issue ? You would expect that our posterity would, in the remotest period of time, adhere to their God, and maintain against all opponents the truth of the books in which the dispensations of God to us and to our successors had been recorded. They would not yield to the objections of men, who, not having experienced the same divine government, should, for want of such experience, refuse assent to their testimony. No ; they would be to the then surrounding nations, what the Jews are to us, witnesses of the existence and of the moral government of God.

Letter VII.

“THE New Testament, they tell us, is founded upon the prophecies of the Old; if so, it must follow the fate of its foundation.” Thus you open your attack upon the New Testament; and I agree with you, that the New Testament must follow the fate of the Old; and that fate is to remain unimpaired by such efforts as you have made against it. The New Testament, however, is not founded solely on the prophecies of the Old. If an heathen from *Athens* or *Rome*, who had never heard of the prophecies of the Old Testament, had been an eye-witness of the miracles of Jesus, he would have made the same conclusion that the Jew Nicodemus did—“Rabbi, we know thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” Our Saviour tells the Jews—“Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me:”—and he bids them search the scriptures, for they testified of him:—but, notwithstanding this appeal to the prophecies of the Old Testament, Jesus said to the Jews, “Though ye believe not me, believe the works”—“Believe me for the very works’ sake”—“If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin.” These are sufficient proofs that the truth of Christ’s mission was not even to the Jews, much less to the Gentiles, founded solely on the truth of the prophecies of the Old Testament.

tament. So that if you could prove some of these prophecies to have been misapplied, and not completed in the person of Jesus, the truth of the Christian religion would not thereby be overturned. That Jesus of Nazareth was the person, in whom all the prophecies, direct and typical, in the Old Testament, respecting the Messiah, were fulfilled, is a proposition founded on those prophecies, and to be proved by comparing them with the history of his life. That Jesus was *a* prophet sent from God, is one proposition—that Jesus was *the* prophet, the Messiah, is another : and though he certainly was both *a* prophet and *the* prophet, yet the foundations of the proof of these propositions are separate and distinct.

The “mere existence of such a woman as Mary, and of such a man as Joseph, and Jesus, is,” you say, “a matter of indifference, about which there is no ground either to believe or to disbelieve.” Belief is different from knowledge, with which you here seem to confound it. We know that the whole is greater than its part, and we know that all the angles in the same segment of a circle are equal to each other—we have intuition and demonstration as grounds of this knowledge ; but is there no ground for belief of past or future existence ? Is there no ground for believing that the sun will exist to-morrow, and that your father existed before you ? You condescend, however, to think it probable, that there were such persons as Mary, Joseph, and Jesus ; and, without troubling yourself about their existence or non-existence, assuming, as it were, for the sake of argument, but without positively granting, their existence,

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you proceed to inform us, “ that it is the fable of Jesus Christ, as told in the New Testament, and the wild and visionary doctrine raised thereon,” against which you contend. You will not repute it a fable, that there was such a man as Jesus Christ; that he lived in Judea near eighteen hundred years ago; that he went about doing good, and preaching, not only in the villages of Galilee, but in the city of Jerusalem; that he had several followers who constantly attended him; that he was put to death by Pontius Pilate; that his disciples were numerous a few years after his death, not only in Judea, but in Rome the capital of the world, and in every province of the Roman empire; that a particular day has been observed in a religious manner by all his followers, in commemoration of a real or supposed resurrection; and that the constant celebration of baptism, and of the Lord’s supper, may be traced back from the present time to him, as the author of those institutions. These things constitute, I suppose, no part of your fable; and if these things be facts, they will, when maturely considered, draw after them so many other things related in the New Testament concerning Jesus, that there will be left for your fable but very scanty materials, which will require great fertility of invention before you will dress them up in any form which will not disgust even a superficial observer.

The miraculous conception you esteem a fable, and in your mind it is an obscene fable. Impure indeed must that man’s imagination be, who can discover any obscenity in the angel’s declaration to Mary—The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall

shall overshadow thee : therefore that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. I wonder you do not find obscenity in Genesis, where it is said, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," and brought order out of confusion, a world out of a chaos, by his fostering influence. As to the Christian faith being built upon the heathen mythology, there is no ground whatever for the assertion ; there would have been some for saying, that much of the heathen mythology was built upon the events recorded in the Old Testament.

You come now to a demonstration, or, which amounts to the same thing, to a proposition which cannot, you say, be controverted :—first, "That the *agreement* of all the parts of a story does not prove that story to be true, because the parts may agree and the whole may be false ;—secondly, that the *disagreement* of the parts of a story proves that the *whole cannot be true*. The agreement does not prove truth, but the disagreement proves falsehood positively." Great use, I perceive, is to be made of this proposition. You will pardon my unskilfulness in dialectics, if I presume to controvert the truth of this abstract proposition, as applied to any purpose in life. The agreement of the parts of a story implies that the story has been told by, at least, two persons (the life of Doctor Johnson, for instance, by Sir John Hawkins and Mr. Boswell.) Now I think it scarcely possible for even two persons, and the difficulty is increased if there are more than two, to write the history of the life of any one of their acquaintance, without there being a considerable difference
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between them, with respect to the number and order of the incidents of his life. Some things will be omitted by one, and mentioned by the other; some things will be briefly touched by one, and the same things will be circumstantially detailed by the other; the same things, which are mentioned in the same way by them both, may not be mentioned as having happened exactly at the same point of time, with other possible and probable differences. But these real or apparent difficulties, in minute circumstances, will not invalidate their testimony as to the material transactions of his life, much less will they render the whole of it a fable. If several independent witnesses, of fair character, should agree in all the parts of a story, (in testifying, for instance, that a murder or a robbery was committed at a particular time, in a particular place, and by a certain individual,) every court of justice in the world would admit the fact, notwithstanding the abstract possibility of the whole being false:—again, if several honest men should agree in saying, that they saw the king of France beheaded, though they should disagree as to the figure of the guillotine, or the size of his executioner, as to the king's hands being bound or loose, as to his being composed or agitated in ascending the scaffold, yet every court of justice in the world would think, that such difference, respecting the circumstances of the fact, did not invalidate the evidence respecting the fact itself. When you speak of the whole of a story, you cannot mean every particular circumstance connected with the story, but not essential to it; you must mean the pith and marrow of the story; for it would be im-

possible to establish the truth of any fact, (of admirals Byng or Keppel, for example, having neglected or not neglected their duty,) if a disagreement in the evidence of witnesses, in minute points, should be considered as annihilating the weight of their evidence, in points of importance. In a word, the relation of a fact differs essentially from the demonstration of a theorem. If one step is left out, one link in the chain of ideas constituting a demonstration is omitted, the conclusion will be destroyed; but a fact may be established, notwithstanding a disagreement of the witnesses in certain trifling particulars of their evidence respecting it.

You apply your incontrovertible proposition to the genealogies of Christ given by Matthew and Luke—there is a disagreement between them; therefore, you say, “If Matthew speak truth, Luke speaks falsehood; and if Luke speak truth, Matthew speaks falsehood; and thence there is no authority for believing either; and if they cannot be believed even in the very first thing they say and set out to prove, they are not entitled to be believed in any thing they say afterwards.” I cannot admit either your premises or your conclusion: not your conclusion; because two authors, who differ in tracing back the pedigree of an individual for above a thousand years, cannot, on that account, be esteemed incompetent to bear testimony to the transactions of his life, unless an intention to falsify could be proved against them. If two Welsh historians should at this time write the life of any remarkable man of their country, who had been dead twenty or thirty years, and should, through different branches of their genealogical tree,

tree, carry up the pedigree to *Cadwallon*, would they, on account of that difference, be discredited in every thing they said? Might it not be believed that they gave the pedigree as they had found it recorded in different instruments, but without the least intention to write a falsehood? I cannot admit your premises; because Matthew speaks truth, and Luke speaks truth, though they do not speak the same truth; Matthew giving the genealogy of Joseph the reputed father of Jesus, and Luke giving the genealogy of Mary the real mother of Jesus. If you will not admit this, other explanations of the difficulty might be given; but I hold it sufficient to say, that the authors had no design to deceive the reader, that they took their accounts from the public registers, which were carefully kept, and that had they been fabricators of these genealogies, they would have been exposed at the time to instant detection; and the certainty of that detection would have prevented them from making the attempt to impose a false genealogy on the Jewish nation.

But that you may effectually overthrow the credit of these genealogies, you make the following calculation:—"From the birth of David to the birth of Christ is upwards of 1080 years; and as there were but twenty-seven full generations, to find the average age of each person mentioned in St. Matthew's list at the time his first son was born, it is only necessary to divide 1080 by 27, which gives 40 years for each person. As the life-time of man was then but of the same extent it is now, it is an absurdity to suppose, that 27 generations should all be old bachelors, before they married. So far from
this

this genealogy being a solemn truth, it is not even a reasonable lie." This argument assumes the appearance of arithmetical accuracy, and the conclusion is in a style which even its truth would not excuse :—yet the argument is good for nothing, and the conclusion is not true. You have read the Bible with some attention ; and you are extremely liberal in imputing to it lies and absurdities ; read it over again, especially the books of the Chronicles, and you will there find, that, in the genealogical list of St. Matthew, three generations are omitted between Joram and Ozias ; Joram was the father of Azariah, Azariah of Joash, Joash of Amaziah, and Amaziah of Ozias. I inquire not, in this place, whence this omission proceeded ; whether it is to be attributed to an error in the genealogical tables from whence Matthew took his account, or to a corruption of the text of the evangelist ; still it is an omission. Now if you will add these three generations to the 27 you mention, and divide 1080 by 30, you will find the average age when these Jews had each of them their first son born was 36. They married sooner than they ought to have done, according to Aristotle, who fixes thirty-seven as the most proper age, when a man should marry. Nor was it necessary that they should have been old bachelors, though each of them had not a son to succeed him till he was thirty-six ; they might have been married at twenty, without having a son till they were forty. You assume in your argument that the first born son succeeded the father in the list—this is not true. Solomon succeeded David ; yet David had at least six sons, who were grown to manhood before Solomon was born ; and Rehoboam

hoboam had at least three sons before he had Abia (Abijah) who succeeded him. It is needless to cite more instances to this purpose ; but from these, and other circumstances which might be insisted upon, I can see no ground for believing, that the genealogy of Jesus Christ, mentioned by St. Matthew, is not a solemn truth.

You insist much upon some things being mentioned by one evangelist, which are not mentioned by all or by any of the others ; and you take this to be a reason why we should consider the gospels, not as the works of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but as the productions of some *unconnected* individuals, each of whom made his own legend. I do not admit the truth of this supposition ; but I may be allowed to use it as an argument against yourself—it removes every possible suspicion of fraud and imposture, and confirms the gospel history in the strongest manner. Four *unconnected* individuals have each written memoirs of the life of Jesus, from whatever source they derived their materials, it is evident that they agree in a great many particulars of the last importance ; such as the purity of his manners ; the sanctity of his doctrines ; the multitude and publicity of his miracles ; the persecuting spirit of his enemies ; the manner of his death ; and the certainty of his resurrection ; and whilst they agree in these great points, their disagreement in points of little consequence is rather a confirmation of the truth, than an indication of the falsehood, of their several accounts. Had they agreed in nothing, their testimony ought to have been rejected as a legendary tale ; had they agreed in every thing,
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it might have been suspected that, instead of unconnected individuals, they were a set of impostors. The manner, in which the evangelists have recorded the particulars of the life of Jesus, is wholly conformable to what we experience in other biographers, and claims our highest assent to its truth; notwithstanding the force of your incontrovertible proposition.

As an instance of contradiction between the evangelists, you tell us, that Matthew says, the angel announcing the immaculate conception appeared unto Joseph; but Luke says, he appeared unto Mary. The angel, Sir, appeared to them both; to Mary, when he informed her that she should, by the power of God, conceive a son; to Joseph, some months afterwards, when Mary's pregnancy was visible; in the interim she had paid a visit of three months to her cousin Elizabeth. It might have been expected, that from the accuracy with which you have read your Bible, you could not have confounded these obviously-distinct appearances; but men, even of candour, are liable to mistakes. Who, you ask, would now believe a girl, who should say she was gotten with child by a ghost? Who, but yourself, would ever have asked a question so abominably indecent and profane? I cannot argue with you on this subject. You will never persuade the world, that the Holy Spirit of God has any resemblance to the stage ghosts in Hamlet or Macbeth, from which you seem to have derived your idea of it.

The story of the massacre of the young children by the order of Herod, is mentioned only by Matthew; and therefore you think it is a lie. We must give up all history if we refuse to

to admit facts recorded by only one historian. Matthew addressed his gospel to the Jews, and put them in mind of a circumstance, of which they must have had a melancholy remembrance; but Gentile converts were less interested in that event. The evangelists were not writing the life of Herod, but of Jesus; it is no wonder that they omitted, above half a century after the death of Herod, an instance of his cruelty, which was not essentially connected with their subject. The massacre, however, was probably known even at Rome; and it was certainly correspondent to the character of Herod. John, you say, at the time of the massacre, "was under two years of age, and yet he escaped; so that the story circumstantially belies itself." John was six months older than Jesus; and you cannot prove that he was not beyond the age to which the order of Herod extended; it probably reached no farther than to those who had completed their first year, without including those who had entered upon their second: but without insisting upon this, still I contend that you cannot prove John to have been under two years of age at the time of the massacre; and I could give many probable reasons to the contrary. Nor is it certain that John was, at that time, in that part of the country to which the edict of Herod extended. But there would be no end of answering, at length, all your little objections.

No two of the evangelists, you observe, agree in reciting, *exactly in the same words*, the written inscription which was put over Christ when he was crucified. I admit that there is an unessential verbal difference; and are you certain that there

there was not a verbal difference in the inscriptions themselves?—One was written in Hebrew, another in Greek, another in Latin; and though they had all the same meaning, yet it is probable, that if two men had translated the Hebrew and the Latin into Greek, there would have been a verbal difference between their translations. You have rendered yourself famous by writing a book called—The Rights of Man:—had you been guillotined by Robespierre, with this title, written in French, English, and German, and affixed to the guillotine—Thomas Paine, of America, author of The Rights of Man—and had four persons, some of whom had seen the execution, and the rest had heard of it from eye-witnesses, written short accounts of your life twenty years or more after your death, and one had said the inscription was—This is Thomas Paine, the author of The Rights of Man—another, The author of The Right of Man—a third, This is the author of The Rights of Man—and a fourth, Thomas Paine, of America, the author of The Rights of Man—would any man of common sense have doubted, on account of this disagreement, the veracity of the authors in writing your life? “The only one,” you tell us, “of the men called apostles, who appears to have been near the spot where Jesus was crucified, was Peter.” This your assertion is not true—we do not know that Peter was present at the crucifixion; but we do know that John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was present; for Jesus spoke to him from the cross.—You go on, “But why should we believe Peter, convicted by their own account of perjury, in swearing that he knew not Jesus?” I will tell
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you why—because Peter sincerely repented of the wickedness into which he had been betrayed, through fear for his life, and suffered martyrdom in attestation of the truth of the Christian religion.

But the evangelists disagree, you say, not only as to the superscription on the cross, but as to the time of the crucifixion, “Mark saying it was at the third hour (nine in the morning,) and John at the sixth hour (twelve, as you suppose, at noon).” Various solutions have been given of this difficulty, none of which satisfied Doctor Middleton, much less can it be expected that any of them should satisfy you; but there is a solution not noticed by him, in which many judicious men have acquiesced—That John, writing his gospel in Asia, used the Roman method of computing time; which was the same as our own; so that by the sixth hour, when Jesus was *condemned*, we are to understand six o’clock in the morning; the intermediate time from six to nine, when he was crucified, being employed in preparing for the crucifixion. But if this difficulty should be still esteemed insuperable, it does not follow that it will always remain so; and if it should, the main point, the crucifixion of Jesus, will not be affected thereby.

I cannot, in this place, omit remarking some circumstances attending the crucifixion, which are so natural, that we might have wondered if they had not occurred. Of all the disciples of Jesus, John was beloved by him with a peculiar degree of affection; and, as kindness produces kindness, there can be little doubt that the regard was reciprocal. Now whom should we expect to be the attendants of Jesus, in his last suf-

fering? Whom but John, the friend of his heart? Whom but his mother, whose soul was now pierced through by the sword of sorrow, which *Simeon* had foretold? Whom but those, who had been attached to him through life; who, having been healed by him of their infirmities, were impelled by gratitude to minister to him of their substance, to be attentive to all his wants?—These were the persons whom we should have expected to attend his execution; and these were there. To whom would an expiring son, of the best affections, recommend a poor, and, probably, a widowed mother, but to his warmest friend?—And this did Jesus. Unmindful of the extremity of his own torture, and anxious to alleviate the burden of her sorrows, and to protect her old age from future want and misery, he said to his beloved disciple —“Behold thy mother! and from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.” I own to you, that such instances as these, of the conformity of events to our probable expectation, are to me genuine marks of the simplicity and truth of the gospels; and far outweigh a thousand little objections, arising from our ignorance of manners, times, and circumstances, or from our incapacity to comprehend the means used by the Supreme Being in the moral government of his creatures.

St. Matthew mentions several miracles which attended our Saviour's crucifixion; the darkness which overspread the land; the rending of the veil of the temple; an earthquake which rent the rocks; and the resurrection of many saints, and their going into the holy city. “Such,” you say, “is the account which this dashing

dashing writer of the book of Matthew gives, but in which he is not supported by the writers of the other books." This is not accurately expressed ; Matthew is supported by Mark and Luke, with respect to two of the miracles, the darkness, and the rending of the veil : and their omission of the others does not prove, that they were either ignorant of them, or disbelieved them. I think it idle to pretend to say positively what influenced them to mention only two miracles ; they probably thought them sufficient to convince any person, as they convinced the centurion, that Jesus " was a righteous man"—" the Son of God." And these two miracles were better calculated to produce general conviction, amongst the persons for whose benefit Mark and Luke wrote their gospels, than either the earthquake or the resurrection of the saints. The earthquake was, probably, confined to a particular spot, and might, by an objector, have been called a natural phenomenon ; and those to whom the saints appeared might, at the time of writing the gospels of Mark and Luke, have been dead : but the darkness must have been generally known and remembered ; and the veil of the temple might still be preserved at the time these authors wrote. As to John not mentioning any of these miracles—it is well known that his gospel was written as a kind of supplement to the other gospels ; he has therefore omitted many things which the other three evangelists had related, and he has added several things which they had not mentioned ; in particular, he has added a circumstance of great importance ; he tells us that he saw one of the soldiers pierce the side of Jesus with a spear,

spear, and that blood and water flowed through the wound ; and lest any one should doubt of the fact, from its not being mentioned by the other evangelists, he asserts it with peculiar earnestness—" And he that saw it, bare record, and his record is true : and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." John saw blood and water flowing from the wound ; the blood is easily accounted for ; but whence came the water ? The anatomists tell us—that it came from the *pericardium* : so consistent is evangelical testimony with the most curious researches into natural science ! You amuse yourself with the account of what the scripture calls *many* saints, and you call an *army* of saints, and are angry with Matthew for not having told you a great many things about them. It is very possible that Matthew might have known the fact of their resurrection, without knowing every thing about them ; but if he had gratified your curiosity in every particular, I am of opinion that you would not have believed a word of what he had told you. I have no curiosity on the subject ; it is enough for me to know that " Christ was the first fruits of them that slept," and " that all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth," as those holy men did, who heard the voice of the Son of God at his resurrection, and passed from death to life. If I durst indulge myself in being wise above what is written, I might be able to answer many of your inquiries relative to these saints : but I dare not touch the ark of the Lord, I dare not support the authority of scripture by the boldness of conjecture. Whatever difficulty there may be in accounting for the silence of
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the other evangelists, and of St. Paul also, on this subject, yet there is a greater difficulty in supposing that Matthew did not give a true narration of what had happened at the crucifixion. If there had been no supernatural darkness, no earthquake, no rending of the veil of the temple, no graves opened, no resurrection of holy men, no appearance of them unto many; if none of these things had been true, or rather if any one of them had been false, what motive could Matthew, writing to the Jews, have had for trumping up such wonderful stories? He wrote, as every man does, with an intention to be believed; and yet every Jew he met would have stared him in the face, and told him that he was a liar and an impostor. What author, who twenty years hence should address to the French nation an history of Louis XVI. would venture to affirm, that when he was beheaded there was darkness for three hours over all France? that there was an earthquake? that rocks were split? graves opened? and dead men brought to life, who appeared to many persons in Paris?—It is quite impossible to suppose, that any one would dare to publish such obvious lies; and I think it equally impossible to suppose, that Matthew would have dared to publish his account of what happened at the death of Jesus, had not that account been generally known to be true.



Letter VIII.

S I R,

THE “tale of the resurrection,” you say,
 “follows that of the crucifixion.” You
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have accustomed me so much to this kind of language, that when I find you speaking of a tale, I have no doubt of meeting with a truth. From the apparent disagreement in the accounts, which the evangelists have given of some circumstances respecting the resurrection, you remark—"If the writers of these books had gone into any court of justice to prove an *alibi*, (for it is of the nature of an *alibi* that is here attempted to be proved, namely, the absence of a dead body by supernatural means,) and had given their evidence in the same contradictory manner, as it is here given; they would have been in danger of having their ears cropt for perjury, and would have justly deserved it"—"hard words, or hanging," it seems, if you had been their judge. Now I maintain, that it is the brevity with which the account of the resurrection is given by all the evangelists, which has occasioned the seeming confusion; and that this confusion would have been cleared up at once, if the witnesses of the resurrection had been examined before any judicature. As we cannot have this *viva voce* examination of all the witnesses, let us call up and question the evangelists as witnesses to a supernatural *alibi*. Did you find the sepulchre of Jesus empty? One of us actually saw it empty, and the rest heard from eye-witnesses, that it was empty. Did you, or any of the followers of Jesus, take away the dead body from the sepulchre? All answer, No. Did the soldiers, or the Jews, take away the body? No. How are you certain of that? Because we saw the body when it was dead, and we saw it afterwards when it was alive. How do you know that what you saw was the body of

of Jesus? We had been long and intimately acquainted with Jesus, and knew his person perfectly. Were you not affrighted, and mistook a spirit for a body? No; the body had flesh and bones; we are sure that it was the very body which hung upon the cross, for we saw the wound in the side, and the print of the nails in the hands and feet. And all this you are ready to swear? We are; and we are ready to die also, sooner than we will deny any part of it.—This is the testimony which all the evangelists would give, in whatever court of justice they were examined; and this, I apprehend, would sufficiently establish the alibi of the dead body from the sepulchre by supernatural means.

But as the resurrection of Jesus is a point which you attack with all your force, I will examine minutely the principal of your objections; I do not think them deserving of this notice, but they shall have it. The book of Matthew, you say, “states that when Christ was put in the sepulchre, the Jews applied to Pilate for a watch or a guard to be placed over the sepulchre, to prevent the body being stolen by the disciples.” I admit this account, but it is not the whole of the account: you have omitted the reason for the request which the chief priests made to Pilate—“Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.” It is material to remark this; for at the very time that Jesus predicted his resurrection, he predicted also his crucifixion, and all that he should suffer from the malice of those very men who now applied to Pilate for a guard.—“He shewed to his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of
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of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." (Matt. xvi. 21.) These men knew full well that the first part of this prediction had been accurately fulfilled through their malignity; and instead of repenting of what they had done, they were so infatuated as to suppose, that by a guard of soldiers they could prevent the completion of the second. The other books, you observe; "say nothing about this application, nor about the sealing of the stone, nor the guard, nor the watch, and according to these accounts there were none." This, Sir, I deny. The other books do not say that there were none of these things; how often must I repeat, that omissions are not contradictions, nor silence concerning a fact a denial of it?

You go on—"The book of Matthew continues its account, that at the end of the Sabbath, as it began to *dawn*, towards the first day of the week, came *Mary Magdalene* and the other *Mary* to see the sepulchre. Mark says it was sun-rising, and John says it was dark. Luke says it was *Mary Magdalene*, and *Joanna*, and *Mary the mother of James*, and *other women*, that came to the sepulchre. And John says that *Mary Magdalene* came alone. So well do they agree about their first evidence! they all appear, however, to have known most about *Mary Magdalene*; she was a woman of a large acquaintance, and it was not an ill conjecture that she might be upon the stroll." This is a long paragraph; I will answer it distinctly: first, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the time when the women went to the sepulchre; all the evangelists agree as to the day

day on which they went ; and, as to the time of the day, it was early in the morning ; what court of justice in the world would set aside this evidence, as insufficient to substantiate the fact of the women's having gone to the sepulchre, because the witnesses differed as to the degree of twilight which lighted them on their way ? Secondly, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the persons who went to the sepulchre ; John states that Mary Magdalene went to the sepulchre ; but he does not state, *as you make him state*, that Mary Magdalene went alone ; she might, for any thing you have proved, or can prove, to the contrary, have been accompanied by all the women mentioned by Luke :—is it an unusual thing to distinguish by name a principal person going on a visit, or an embassy, without mentioning his subordinate attendants ? Thirdly, in opposition to your insinuation that Mary Magdalene was a common woman, I wish it to be considered, whether there is any scriptural authority for that imputation ; and whether there be or not, I must contend, that a repentant and reformed woman, ought not to be esteemed an improper witness of a fact. The conjecture, which you adopt concerning her, is nothing less than an illiberal, indecent, unfounded calumny, not excusable in the mouth of a libertine, and intolerable in yours.

The book of Matthew, you observe, goes on to say—“ And behold there was an earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and *sat upon it* :—but the other books say nothing about any earthquake ;”—what then ? does their silence prove that there

was none?—"nor about the angel rolling back the stone and sitting upon it;"—what then? does their silence prove that the stone was not rolled back by an angel, and that he did not sit upon it?—"and according to their accounts there was no angel sitting there." This conclusion I must deny; their accounts do not say there was no angel sitting there, at the time that Matthew says he sat upon the stone. They do not deny the fact, they simply omit the mention of it; and they all take notice that the women, when they arrived at the sepulchre, found the stone rolled away: hence it is evident that the stone was rolled away *before* the women arrived at the sepulchre; and the other evangelists, giving an account of what happened to the women *when* they reached the sepulchre, have merely omitted giving an account of a transaction previous to their arrival. Where is the contradiction? What space of time intervened between the rolling away the stone, and the arrival of the women at the sepulchre, is nowhere mentioned; but it certainly was long enough for the angel to have changed his position; from sitting on the outside he might have entered into the sepulchre; and another angel might have made his appearance; or, from the first, there might have been two, one on the outside rolling away the stone, and the other within. Luke, you tell us, "says there were two, and they were both standing; and John says there were two, and both sitting." It is impossible, I grant, even for an angel to be sitting and standing at the same instant of time; but Luke and John do not speak of the same instant, nor of the same appearance—Luke
speaks

speaks of the appearance to all the women; and John of the appearance to Mary Magdalene alone, who tarried weeping at the sepulchre after Peter and John had left it. But I forbear making any more minute remarks on still minuter objections, all of which are grounded on this mistake—that the angels were seen at one particular time, in one particular place, and by the same individuals.

As to your inference, from Matthew's using the expression *unto this day*, "that the book must have been manufactured after a lapse of some generations at least," it cannot be admitted against the positive testimony of all antiquity. That the story about stealing away the body was a bungling story, I readily admit; but the chief priests are answerable for it; it is not worthy either your notice, or mine, except as it is a strong instance to you, to me, and to every body, how far prejudice may mislead the understanding.

You come to that part of the evidence in those books that respects, you say, "the pretended appearances of Christ after his pretended resurrection; the writer of the book of Matthew relates, that the angel that was sitting on the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre, said to the two Marys, (chap. xxviii. 7.) "Behold, Christ is gone before you into Galilee, there shall you see him." The gospel, Sir, was preached to poor and illiterate men: and it is the duty of priests to preach it to them in all its purity; to guard them against the errors of mistaken, or the designs of wicked men. You then, who can read your Bible, turn to this passage, and you will find that the angel did not say, "Behold,

hold, Christ *is gone* before you into Galilee," but, "Behold *he goeth* before you into Galilee." I know not what Bible you made use of in this quotation, none that I have seen render the original word by—he is gone:—it might be properly rendered, he will go; and it is literally rendered, he is going. This phrase does not imply an immediate setting out for Galilee: when a man has fixed upon a long journey to London or Bath, it is common enough to say, he is going to London or Bath, though the time of his going may be at some distance. Even your dashing Matthew could not be guilty of such a blunder as to make the angel say *he is gone*; for he tells us immediately afterwards, that, as the women were departing from the sepulchre to tell his disciples what the angels had said to them, Jesus himself met them. Now how Jesus could be *gone* into Galilee, and yet meet the women at Jerusalem, I leave you to explain, for the blunder is not chargeable upon Matthew. I excuse your introducing the expression—"then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee," for the quotation is rightly made; but had you turned to the Greek Testament, you would not have found in this place any word answering to *then*; the passage is better translated—and the eleven. Christ had said to his disciples, (Matth. xxvi. 32.) "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee:" and the angel put the women in mind of the very expression and prediction—*He is risen, as he said; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee.* Matthew, intent upon the appearance in Galilee, of which there were, probably, at the time
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he wrote, many living witnesses in Judea, omits the mention of many appearances taken notice of by John, and, by this omission, seems to connect the day of the resurrection of Jesus, with that of the departure of the disciples for Galilee. You seem to think this a great difficulty, and incapable of solution ; for you say—" It is not possible, unless we admit these disciples the right of wilful lying, that the writers of these books could be any of the eleven persons called disciples ; for if, according to Matthew, the eleven went into Galilee to meet Jesus in a mountain, by his own appointment, on the same day that he is said to have risen, Luke and John must have been two of that eleven ; yet the writer of Luke says expressly, and John implies as much, that the meeting was that same day in a house at Jerusalem ; and on the other hand, if, according to Luke and John, the *eleven* were assembled in a house at Jerusalem, Matthew must have been one of that eleven ; yet Matthew says, the meeting was in a mountain in Galilee, and consequently the evidence given in those books destroys each other." When I was a young man in the university, I was pretty much accustomed to drawing of consequences ; but my *Alma Mater* did not suffer me to draw consequences after your manner ; she taught me—that a false position must end in an absurd conclusion. I have shewn your position—that the eleven went into Galilee on the day of the resurrection—to be false, and hence your consequence—that the evidence given in these two books destroys each other—is not to be admitted. You ought, moreover, to have considered, that the feast of unleavened bread, which im-

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mediately followed the day on which the pass-over was eaten, lasted seven days; and that strict observers of the law did not think themselves at liberty to leave Jerusalem, till that feast was ended; and this is a collateral proof that the disciples did not go to Galilee on the day of the resurrection.

You certainly have read the New Testament, but not, I think, with great attention, or you would have known who the apostles were. In this place you reckon *Luke* as one of the eleven, and in other places you speak of him as an eye-witness of the things he relates; you ought to have known that *Luke* was no apostle; and he tells you himself in the preface to his gospel, that he wrote from the testimony of others. If this mistake proceeds from your ignorance, you are not a fit person to write comments on the Bible; if from design (which I am unwilling to suspect) you are still less fit; in either case it may suggest to your readers the propriety of suspecting the truth and accuracy of your assertions, however daring and intemperate. “Of the numerous priests or parsons of the present day, bishops and all, the sum total of whose learning,” according to you, “is a bab, and hic, hæc, hoc, there is not one amongst them,” you say, “who can write poetry like *Homer*, or science like *Euclid*.” If I should admit this, (though there are many of them, I doubt not, who understand these authors better than you do,) yet I cannot admit that there is one amongst them, bishops and all, so ignorant as to rank *Luke* the evangelist among the apostles of Christ. I will not press this point; any man may fall into a mistake, and the consciousness of this fallibility

libility should create in all men a little modesty, a little diffidence, a little caution, before they presume to call the most illustrious characters of antiquity, liars, fools, and knaves.

You want to know why Jesus did not shew himself to all the people after his resurrection. This is one of Spinoza's objections; and it may sound well enough in the mouth of a Jew, wishing to excuse the infidelity of his countrymen: but it is not judiciously adopted by deists of other nations. God gives us the means of health, but he does not force us to the use of them; he gives us the powers of the mind, but he does not compel us to the cultivation of them: he gave the Jews opportunities of seeing the miracles of Jesus, but he did not oblige them to believe them. They who persevered in their incredulity after the resurrection of Lazarus, would have persevered also after the resurrection of Jesus. Lazarus had been buried four days, Jesus but three; the body of Lazarus had begun to undergo corruption, the body of Jesus saw no corruption; why should you expect, that they would have believed in Jesus on his own resurrection, when they had not believed in him on the resurrection of Lazarus? When the Pharisees were told of the resurrection of Lazarus, they, together with the chief priests, gathered a council, and said—"What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: then from that day forth they took counsel together to put him to death." The great men at Jerusalem, you see, admitted that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead; yet the belief of that miracle did not generate conviction that
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Jesus was the Christ ; it only exasperated their malice, and accelerated their purpose of destroying him. Had Jesus shewn himself after his resurrection, the chief priests would probably have gathered another council, have opened it with, What do we ? and ended it with a determination to put him to death. As to us, the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, which we have in the New Testament, is far more convincing, than if it had been related that he shewed himself to every man in Jerusalem ; for then we should have had a suspicion, that the whole story had been fabricated by the Jews.

You think Paul an improper witness of the resurrection : I think him one of the fittest that could have been chosen ; and for this reason—his testimony is the testimony of a former enemy. He had, in his own miraculous conversion, sufficient ground for changing his opinion as to a matter of fact ; for believing that to have been a fact, which he had formerly, through extreme prejudice, considered as a fable. For the truth of the resurrection of Jesus he appeals to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses ; and before whom does he make this appeal ?—Before his enemies, who were able and willing to blast his character, if he had advanced an untruth. You know, undoubtedly, that Paul had resided at Corinth near two years ; that, during a part of that time, he had testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ ; that, finding the bulk of that nation obstinate in their unbelief, he had turned to the Gentiles, and had converted many to the faith in Christ ; that he left Corinth, and went to preach the gospel in other parts ; that, about three years after he
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had quitted Corinth, he wrote a letter to the converts which he had made in that place, and who after his departure had been split into different factions, and had adopted different teachers in opposition to Paul. From this account we may be certain, that Paul's letter, and every circumstance in it would be minutely examined. The city of Corinth was full of Jews; these men were, in general, Paul's bitter enemies; yet, in the face of them all, he asserts, "that Jesus Christ was buried; that he rose again the third day; that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; that he was afterwards seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part were then alive. An appeal to above 250 living witnesses, is a pretty strong proof of a fact; but it becomes irresistible, when that appeal is submitted to the judgment of enemies. St. Paul, you must allow, was a man of ability; but he would have been an ideot, had he put it in the power of his enemies to prove, from his own letter, that he was a lying rascal. They neither proved nor attempted to prove, any such thing; and therefore we may safely conclude, that this testimony of Paul to the resurrection of Jesus was true: and it is a testimony, in my opinion, of the greatest weight.

You come, you say, to the last scene, the ascension; upon which, in your opinion, "the reality of the future mission of the disciples was to rest for proof." I do not agree with you in this. The reality of the future mission of the apostles might have been proved, though Jesus Christ had not visibly ascended into heaven. Miracles are the proper proofs of a divine mission; and when

Jesus gave the apostles a commission to preach the gospel, he commanded them to stay at Jerusalem, till they “were endued with power from on high.” Matthew has omitted the mention of the ascension; and John, you say, has not said a syllable about it. I think otherwise. John has not given an express account of the ascension, but has certainly said something about it; for he informs us, that Jesus said to Mary—“Touch me not; for I am not yet *ascended* to my father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I *ascend* unto my father and your father, and to my God and your God.” This is surely saying something about the ascension; and if the fact of the ascension be not related by John or Matthew, it may reasonably be supposed, that the omission was made, on account of the notoriety of the fact. That the fact was generally known, may be justly collected from the reference which Peter makes to it in the hearing of all the Jews, a very few days after it had happened—“This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being *by the right hand of God* exalted. Paul bears testimony also to the ascension, when he says, that Jesus was *received up into glory*. As to the difference you contend for, between the account of the ascension, as given by Mark and Luke, it does not exist; except in this, that Mark omits the particulars of Jesus going with his apostles to Bethany, and blessing them there, which are mentioned by Luke. But omissions, I must often put you in mind, are not contradictions.

You have now, you say, “gone through the examination of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; and when it is considered

considered that the whole space of time, from the crucifixion to what is called the ascension, is but a few days, apparently not more than three or four, and that all the circumstances are reported to have happened near the same spot, Jerusalem, it is, I believe, impossible to find, in any story upon record, so many, and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods, as are in those books." What am I to say to this? Am I to say that, in writing this paragraph, you have forfeited your character as an honest man? Or, admitting your honesty, am I to say that you are grossly ignorant of the subject? Let the reader judge. John says, that Jesus appeared to his disciples at Jerusalem on the day of his resurrection, and that Thomas was not then with them. The same John says, that after *eight days* he appeared to them again, when Thomas was with them. Now, Sir, how *apparently three or four days* can be consistent with *really eight days*, I leave you to make out. But this is not the whole of John's testimony, either with respect to *place* or *time*; for he says—After these things (after the two appearances to the disciples at Jerusalem, on the first and on the eighth day after the resurrection) Jesus shewed himself again to his disciples at the sea of *Tiberias*. The sea of Tiberias, I presume you know, was in Galilee; and Galilee, you may know, was sixty or seventy miles from Jerusalem; it must have taken the disciples some time, after the eighth day, to travel from Jerusalem into Galilee. What, in your own insulting language to the priests, what have you to answer, as to the *same spot Jerusalem*, as to your apparently *three or four days*? But this is not all. Luke,

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in the beginning of the Acts, refers to his gospel, and says—"Christ shewed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of the apostles forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: instead of *four*, you perceive there were *forty* days between the crucifixion and the ascension. I need not, I trust, after this, trouble myself about the falsehoods and contradictions which you impute to the evangelists; your readers cannot but be upon their guard, as to the credit due to your assertions, however bold and improper. You will suffer me to remark, that the evangelists were plain men; who, convinced of the truth of their narration, and conscious of their own integrity, have related what they knew, with admirable simplicity. They seem to have said to the Jews of their time, and to say to the Jews and unbelievers of all times, We have told you the truth; and if you will not believe us, we have nothing more to say. Had they been impostors, they would have written with more caution and art, have obviated every cavil, and avoided every appearance of contradiction. This they have not done; and this I consider as a proof of their honesty and veracity.

John the Baptist had given his testimony to the truth of our Saviour's mission in the most unequivocal terms; he afterwards sent two of his disciples to Jesus, to ask him whether he was really the expected Messiah or not. Matthew relates *both* these circumstances: had the writer of the book of Matthew been an impostor, would he have invalidated John's testimony, by bringing forward his real or apparent doubt? Impossible! Matthew, having proved the resurrection

of Jesus, tells us, that the eleven disciples went away into Galilee into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them, and “when they saw him, they worshipped him : but some doubted.” Would an impostor, in the very last place where he mentions the resurrection, and in the conclusion of his book, have suggested such a cavil to unbelievers, as to say—some doubted ? Impossible ! The evangelist has left us to collect the reason why some doubted :—the disciples saw Jesus, at a distance, on the mountain ; and some of them fell down and worshipped him ; whilst others doubted whether the person they saw was really Jesus ; their doubt, however, could not have lasted long, for in the very next verse we are told, that Jesus came and spake unto them.

Great and laudable pains have been taken by many learned men, to harmonize the several accounts given us by the evangelists of the resurrection. It does not seem to me to be a matter of any great consequence to Christianity, whether the accounts can, in every minute particular, be harmonized or not ; since there is no such discordance in them, as to render the fact of the resurrection doubtful to any impartial mind. If any man, in a court of justice, should give positive evidence of a fact ; and three others should afterwards be examined, and all of them should confirm the evidence of the first as to the fact, but should apparently differ from him and from each other, by being more or less particular in their accounts of the circumstances attending the fact ; ought we to doubt of the fact, because we could not harmonize the evidence respecting the circumstances relating to it ? The omission of any one circumstance (such as that
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of Mary Magdalene having gone twice to the sepulchre ; or that of the angel having, after he had rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, entered into the sepulchre) may render an harmony impossible, without having recourse to supposition to supply the defect. You deists laugh at all such attempts, and call them priestcraft. I think it better then, in arguing with you, to admit that there may be (not granting, however, that there is) an irreconcilable difference between the evangelists in some of their accounts respecting the life of Jesus, or his resurrection. Be it so ; what then ? Does this difference, admitting it to be real, destroy the credibility of the gospel history in any of its essential points ? Certainly, in my opinion, not. As I look upon this to be a general answer to most of your deistical objections, I profess my sincerity, in saying, that I consider it as a true and sufficient answer ; and I leave it to your consideration. I have, purposely, in the whole of this discussion, been silent as to the inspiration of the evangelists ; well knowing that you would have rejected, with scorn, any thing I could have said on this point : but, in disputing with a deist, I do most solemnly contend, that the Christian religion is true, and worthy of all acceptance, whether the evangelists were inspired or not.

Unbelievers, in general, wish to conceal their sentiments ; they have a decent respect for public opinion ; are cautious of affronting the religion of their country ; fearful of undermining the foundations of civil society. Some few have been more daring, but less judicious ; and have, without disguise, professed their unbelief. But you are the first who ever swore that he was an infidel,

infidel, concluding your deistical creed with—
So help me God! I pray that God may help you; that he may, through the influence of his Holy Spirit, bring you to a right mind; convert you to the religion of his Son, whom, out of his abundant love to mankind, he sent into the world, that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

You swear, that you think the Christian religion is not true. I give full credit to your oath; it is an oath in confirmation—of what?—of an opinion. It proves the sincerity of your declaration of your opinion; but the opinion, notwithstanding the oath, may be either true or false. Permit me to produce to you an oath not confirming an opinion, but a fact; it is the oath of St. Paul, when he swears to the Galatians, that, in what he told them of his miraculous conversion, he did not tell a lie: “Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not:”—do but give that credit to Paul which I give to you, do but consider the difference between an opinion and a fact, and I shall not despair of your becoming a Christian.

Deism, you say, consists in a belief of one God, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what is called virtue; and in this (as far as religion is concerned) you rest all your hopes. There is nothing in deism but what is in Christianity, but there is much in Christianity which is not in deism. The Christian has no doubt concerning a future state; every deist, from Plato to Thomas Paine, is on this subject overwhelmed with doubts insuperable by human reason. The Christian has no misgivings as to the pardon of penitent sinners, through
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the intercession of a mediator ; the deist is harassed with apprehension lest the moral justice of God should demand, with inexorable rigour, punishment for transgression. The Christian has no doubt concerning the lawfulness and the efficacy of prayer ; the deist is disturbed on this point by abstract considerations concerning the goodness of God, which wants not to be intreated ; concerning his foresight, which has no need of our information ; concerning his immutability, which cannot be changed through our supplication. The Christian admits the providence of God, and the liberty of human actions ; the deist is involved in great difficulties, when he undertakes the proof of either. The Christian has assurance that the Spirit of God will help his infirmities ; the deist does not deny the possibility that God may have access to the human mind, but he has no ground to believe the fact of his either enlightening the understanding, influencing the will, or purifying the heart.



Letter IX.

S I R,

“ **T**HOSE,” you say, “ who are not much acquainted with ecclesiastical history, may suppose that the book called the New Testament has existed ever since the time of Jesus Christ ; but the fact is historically otherwise ; there was no such book as the New Testament till more than three hundred years after the time that Christ is said to have lived.” This paragraph
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is calculated to mislead common readers ; it is necessary to unfold its meaning. The Book, called the New Testament, consists of twenty-seven different parts ; concerning seven of these, viz. the epistle to the Hebrews, that of James, the second of Peter, the second of John, the third of John, that of Jude, and the Revelation, there were at first some doubts ; and the question, whether they should be received into the canon, might be decided, as all questions concerning opinions must be, by vote. With respect to the other twenty parts, those who are most acquainted with ecclesiastical history will tell you, as Du Pin does after Eusebius, that they were owned as canonical, at all times, and by all Christians. Whether the council of Laodicea was held before or after that of Nice, is not a settled point ; all the books of the New Testament, except the Revelation, are enumerated as canonical in the Constitutions of that council ; but it is a great mistake to suppose, that the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were not in *general use* amongst Christians, long before the council of Laodicea was held. This is not merely my opinion on the subject ; it is the opinion of one much better acquainted with ecclesiastical history than I am, and, probably, than you are,—*Mosheim*. “The opinions,” says this author, “or rather the conjectures, of the learned concerning the time when the books of the New Testament were collected into one volume, as also about the authors of that collection, are extremely different. This important question is attended with great and almost insuperable difficulties to us in these latter times. It is however sufficient

for us to know, that, before the middle of the second century, the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were read in every Christian society throughout the world, and received as a divine rule of faith and manners. Hence it appears, that these sacred writings were carefully separated from several human compositions upon the same subject, either by some of the apostles themselves, who lived so long, or by their disciples and successors, who were spread abroad through all nations. We are well assured, that the *four gospels* were collected during the life of St. John, and that the three first received the approbation of this divine apostle. And why may we not suppose, that the other books of the New Testament were gathered together at the same time? What renders this highly probable is, that the most urgent necessity required its being done. For, not long after Christ's ascension into heaven, several histories of his life and doctrines, full of pious frauds, and fabulous wonders, were composed by persons, whose intentions, perhaps, were not bad, but whose writings discovered the greatest superstition and ignorance. Nor was this all: productions appeared, which were imposed on the world by fraudulent men as the writings of the holy apostles. These apocryphal and spurious writings must have produced a sad confusion, and rendered both the history and the doctrine of Christ uncertain, had not the rulers of the church used all possible care and diligence in separating the books that were truly apostolical and divine, from all that spurious trash, and conveying them down to posterity in one volume."

Did you ever read the apology for the Christians, which Justin Martyr presented to the emperor Antoninus Pius, to the senate, and people of Rome? I should sooner expect a falsity in a petition, which any body of persecuted men, imploring justice, should present to the king and parliament of Great Britain, than in this apology. Yet in this apology, which was presented not fifty years after the death of St. John, not only parts of *all the four gospels are quoted*, but it is expressly said, that on the day called Sunday, a portion of them was read in the public assemblies of the Christians. I forbear pursuing this matter farther; else it might easily be shewn, that probably the gospels, and certainly some of St. Paul's epistles, were known to *Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp*, contemporaries with the apostles. These men could not quote or refer to books which did not exist; and therefore, though you could make it out that the book called the New Testament did not formally exist under that title, till 350 years after Christ; yet I hold it to be a certain fact, that all the books, of which it is composed, were written, and most of them received by all Christians, within a few years after his death.

You raise a difficulty relative to the time which intervened between the death and resurrection of Jesus, who had said, that the Son of Man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Are you ignorant then that the Jews used the phrase three days and three nights to denote what we understand by three days? It is said in Genesis, (chap. vii. 12.) "The rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights;" and this is equivalent to the expression,

expression, (ver. 17.) “And the flood was forty days upon the earth.” Instead then of saying three days and three nights, let us simply say—three days—and you will not object to Christ’s being three days—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, in the heart of the earth. I do not say that he was in the grave the whole of either Friday or Sunday; but an hundred instances might be produced from writers of all nations, in which a part of a day is spoken of as the whole. Thus much for the defence of the historical part of the New Testament.

You have introduced an account of *Fauftus*, as denying the genuineness of the books of the New Testament. Will you permit that great scholar in sacred literature, *Michaelis*, to tell you something about this *Fauftus*?—“He was ignorant, as were most of the African writers, of the Greek language, and acquainted with the New Testament merely through the channel of the Latin translation: he was not only devoid of a sufficient fund of learning, but illiterate in the highest degree. An argument, which he brings against the genuineness of the gospel, affords sufficient ground for this assertion; for he contends, that the gospel of St. Matthew could not have been written by St. Matthew himself, because he is always mentioned in the third person.” You know who has argued like *Fauftus*, but I did not think myself authorised on that account to call you illiterate in the highest degree; but *Michaelis* makes a still more severe conclusion concerning *Fauftus*; and he extends his observation to every man who argued like him—“A man capable of such an argument must have been ignorant not only of the Greek writers,

writers, the knowledge of which could not have been expected from Faustus, but even of the Commentaries of Cæsar. And were it thought improbable that so heavy a charge could be laid with justice on the side of his knowledge, it would fall with double weight on the side of his honesty, and induce us to suppose, that, preferring the arts of sophistry to the plainness of truth, he maintained opinions which he believed to be false." (Marsh's Transl.) Never more, I think, shall we hear of Moses not being the author of the Pentateuch, on account of its being written in the third person.

Not being able to produce any argument to render questionable either the genuineness or the authenticity of St. Paul's Epistles, you tell us, that "it is a matter of no great importance by whom they were written, since the writer, whoever he was, attempts to prove his doctrine by argument : he does not pretend to have been witness to any of the scenes told of the resurrection and ascension, and he declares that he had not believed them." That Paul had so far resisted the evidence which the apostles had given of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, as to be a persecutor of the disciples of Christ, is certain ; but I do not remember the place where he declares that he had not believed them. The high priest and the senate of the children of Israel did not deny the reality of the miracles, which had been wrought by Peter and the apostles ; they did not contradict their testimony concerning the resurrection and the ascension ; but whether they believed it or not, they were fired with indignation, and took counsel to put the apostles to death : and this

was also the temper of Paul ; whether he believed or did not believe the story of the resurrection, he was exceedingly mad against the saints. The writer of Paul's epistles does not attempt to prove his doctrine by argument ; he in many places tells us, that his doctrine was not taught him by man, or any invention of his own, which required the ingenuity of argument to prove it :—" I certify you, brethren, that the gospel, which was preached of me, is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul does not pretend to have been a witness of the *story* of the resurrection, but he does much more ; he asserts, that he was himself a witness of the resurrection. After enumerating many appearances of Jesus to his disciples, Paul says of himself, " Last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Whether you will admit Paul to have been a *true* witness or not, you cannot deny that he pretends to have been *a* witness of the resurrection.

The story of his being struck to the ground, as he was journeying to Damascus, has nothing in it, you say, miraculous or extraordinary : you represent him as struck by lightning. It is somewhat extraordinary for a man, who is struck by lightning, to have, at the very time, full possession of his understanding ; to hear a voice issuing from the lightning, speaking to him in the Hebrew tongue, calling him by his name, and entering into conversation with him. His companions, you say, appear not to have suffered in the same manner :—the greater the wonder. : If it was a common storm of thunder
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and lightning which struck Paul and all his companions to the ground, it is somewhat extraordinary that he alone should be hurt; and that, notwithstanding his being struck blind by lightning, he should in other respects be so little hurt, as to be immediately able to walk into the city of Damascus. So difficult is it to oppose truth by an hypothesis! In the character of Paul you discover a great deal of violence and fanaticism; and such men, you observe, are never good moral evidences of any doctrine they preach. Read, Sir, Lord *Lyttleton's* observations on the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul; and I think you will be convinced of the contrary. That elegant writer thus expresses his opinion on this subject—"Besides all the proofs of the Christian religion, which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the necessary connexion it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other apostles, I think the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, is, of itself, a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation." I hope this opinion will have some weight with you; it is not the opinion of a lying Bible-prophet, of a stupid evangelist, or of an a b ab priest,—but of a learned layman, whose illustrious rank received splendor from his talents.

You are displeased with St. Paul "for setting out to prove the resurrection of the *same* body." You know, I presume, that the resurrection of the same body is not, by all, admitted to be a scriptural doctrine. "In the New Testament

Testament (wherein, I think, are contained all the articles of the Christian faith) I find our Saviour and the apostles to preach *the resurrection of the dead*, and the *resurrection from the dead*, in many places ; but I do not remember any place where the resurrection of the same body is so much as mentioned." This observation of Mr. Locke I so far adopt, as to deny that you can produce any place in the writings of St. Paul, wherein he sets out to prove the resurrection of the same body. I do not question the possibility of the resurrection of the same body, and I am not ignorant of the manner in which some learned men have explained it ; (somewhat after the way of your vegetative speck in the kernel of a peach ;) but as you are discrediting St. Paul's doctrine, you ought to shew that what you attempt to discredit is the doctrine of the apostle. As a matter of choice, you had rather have a better body—you will have a better body,—“ your natural body will be raised a spiritual body,” your corruptible will put on incorruption. You are so much out of humour with your present body, that you inform us, every animal in the creation excels us in something. Now I had always thought, that the single circumstance of our having hands, and their having none, gave us an infinite superiority not only over insects, fishes, snails, and spiders, (which you represent as excelling us in loco-motive powers,) but over all the animals of the creation ; and enabled us, in the language of Cicero, describing the manifold utility of our hands, to make as it were a new nature of things. As to what you say about the consciousness of existence being the
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only conceivable idea of a future life—it proves nothing, either for or against the resurrection of a body, or of the same body ; it does not inform us, whether to any or to what substance, material or immaterial, this consciousness is annexed. I leave it, however, to others, who do not admit personal identity to consist in consciousness, to dispute with you on this point, and willingly subscribe to the opinion of Mr. Locke, “ that nothing but consciousness can unite remote existences into the same person.”

From a caterpillar’s passing into a torpid state resembling death, and afterwards appearing a splendid butterfly, and from the (supposed) consciousness of existence which the animal had in these different states, you ask, Why must I believe, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in me the consciousness of existence hereafter ? I do not dislike analogical reasoning, when applied to proper objects, and kept within due bounds : but where is it said in scripture, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in you the consciousness of existence ? Those who admit a conscious state of the soul between death and the resurrection, will contend, that the soul is the substance in which consciousness is continued without interruption : those who deny the intermediate state of the soul as a state of consciousness, will contend, that consciousness is not destroyed by death, but suspended by it, as it is suspended during a sound sleep ; and that it may as easily be restored after death, as after sleep, during which the faculties of the soul are not extinct, but dormant. Those who think that the soul is nothing distinct from the compages of the body, not
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a substance but a mere quality, will maintain, that the consciousness appertaining to every individual person is not lost when the body is destroyed ; that it is known to God ; and may, at the general resurrection, be annexed to any system of matter he may think fit, or to that particular compages to which it belonged in this life.

In reading your book I have been frequently shocked at the virulence of your zeal, at the indecorum of your abuse in applying vulgar and offensive epithets to men who have been held, and who will long, I trust, continue to be held, in high estimation. I know that the scar of calumny is seldom wholly effaced; it remains long after the wound is healed ; and your abuse of holy men and holy things will be remembered, when your arguments against them are refuted and forgotten. Moses you term an arrogant coxcomb, a chief assassin ; Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, monsters and impostors ; the Jewish kings a parcel of rascals ; Jeremiah and the rest of the prophets, liars ; and Paul a fool, for having written one of the sublimest compositions, and on the most important subject that ever occupied the mind of man—the lesson in our burial service ; this lesson you call a doubtful jargon, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of the bell at the funeral. Men of low condition ! pressed down, as you often are, by calamities generally incident to human nature, and groaning under burdens of misery peculiar to your condition, what thought you when you heard this lesson read at the funeral of your child, your parent, or your friend ? Was it
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mere jargon to you, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of a bell? No. You understood from it, that you would not all sleep, but that you would all be changed in a moment at the last trump; you understood from it, that this corruptible must put on incorruption, that this mortal must put on immortality, and that death would be swallowed up in victory; you understood from it, that if (notwithstanding profane attempts to subvert your faith) ye continue stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, your labour will not be in vain.

You seem fond of displaying your skill in science and philosophy; you speak more than once of Euclid; and, in censuring St. Paul, you intimate to us, that when the apostle says, One star differeth from another star in glory—he ought to have said—in distance. All men *see* that one star differeth from another star in glory or brightness; but few men *know* that their difference in brightness arises from their difference in distance; and I beg leave to say, that even you, philosopher as you are, do not *know* it. You make an assumption which you cannot prove—that the stars are *equal* in magnitude, and placed at *different* distances from the earth;—but you cannot prove that they are not *different* in magnitude, and placed at *equal* distances, though none of them may be so near to the earth, as to have any sensible annual *parallax*. I beg pardon of my readers for touching upon this subject; but it really moves one's indignation, to see a smattering in philosophy urged as an argument against the veracity of an apostle. “Little learning is a dangerous thing.”
Paul,

Paul, you say, affects to be a naturalist ; and to prove (you might more properly have said illustrate) his system of resurrection from the principles of vegetation—"Thou fool," says he, "that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die :"—to which one might reply, in his own language, and say—"Thou fool, Paul, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die *not*." It may be seen, I think, from this passage, who affects to be a naturalist, to be acquainted with the microscopical discoveries of modern times ; which were probably neither known to Paul, nor to the Corinthians ; and which, had they been known to them both, would have been of little use in the illustration of the subject of the resurrection. Paul said—that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die :—every husbandman in Corinth, though unable perhaps to define the term death, would understand the apostle's phrase in a popular sense, and agree with him that a grain of wheat must become *rotten* in the ground before it could sprout ; and that, as God raised from a rotten grain of wheat, the roots, the stem, the leaves, the ear of a new plant, he might also cause a new body to spring up from the rotten carcass in the grave. Doctor *Clarke* observes, "In like manner as in every grain of corn there is contained a minute insensible seminal principle, which is itself the entire future blade and ear, and in due season, when all the rest of the grain is corrupted, evolves and unfolds itself visibly to the eye ; so our present mortal and corruptible body may be but the *exuviae*, as it were, of some hidden and at present insensible principle, (possibly the present seat of the soul,) which

which at the resurrection shall discover itself in its proper form." I do not agree with this great man (for such I esteem him) in this philosophical conjecture; but the quotation may serve to shew you, that the germ does not evolve and unfold itself visibly to the eye till all the rest of the grain is *corrupted*; that is, in the language and meaning of St. Paul, till it *dies*. Though the authority of Jesus may have as little weight with you as that of Paul, yet it may not be improper to quote to you our Saviour's expression, when he foretels the numerous disciples which his death would produce—"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and *die*, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." You perceive from this, that the Jews thought the death of the grain was necessary to its re-production: hence every one may see what little reason you had to object to the apostle's popular illustration of the possibility of a resurrection. Had he known as much as any naturalist in Europe does, of the progress of an animal from one state to another, as from a worm to a butterfly, (which you think applies to the case,) I am of opinion he would not have used that illustration in preference to what he has used, which is obvious and satisfactory.

Whether the fourteen epistles ascribed to Paul were written by him or not, is, in your judgment, a matter of indifference. So far from being a matter of indifference, I consider the genuineness of St. Paul's epistles to be a matter of the greatest importance; for if the epistles, ascribed to Paul, were written by him, (and there is unquestionable proof that they were,) it will be difficult for you, or for any
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man, upon fair principles of sound reasoning, to deny that the Christian religion is true. The argument is a short one, and obvious to every capacity. It stands thus : St. Paul wrote several letters to those whom, in different countries, he had converted to the Christian faith ; in these letters he affirms two things ; first, that he had wrought miracles in their presence ; secondly, that many of themselves had received the gift of tongues, and other miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. The persons to whom these letters were addressed must, on reading them, have certainly known, whether Paul affirmed what was true, or told a plain lie ; they must have known, whether they had seen him work miracles ; they must have been conscious, whether they themselves did or did not possess any miraculous gifts. Now can you, or can any man, believe, for a moment, that Paul (a man certainly of great abilities) would have written public letters, full of lies, and which could not fail of being discovered to be lies, as soon as his letters were read ? Paul could not be guilty of falsehood in these two points, or in either of them ; and if either of them be true, the Christian religion is true. References to these two points are frequent in St. Paul's epistles : I will mention only a few. In his epistle to the Galatians, he says, (chap. iii. 2, 5.) " This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit (gifts of the Spirit) by the works of the law ? He ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you." To the Thessalonians he says, (1 Theff. chap. i. 5.) " Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost.

To the Corinthians he thus expresses himself : (1 Cor. ii. 4.) “ My preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power ; ”—and he adds the reason for his working miracles—“ That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” With what alacrity would the faction at Corinth, which opposed the apostle, have laid hold of this and many similar declarations in the letter, had they been able to have detected any falsehood in them ! There is no need to multiply words on so clear a point—the genuineness of Paul’s epistles proves their authenticity, independently of every other proof ; for it is absurd in the extreme to suppose him, under circumstances of obvious detection, capable of advancing what was not true ; and if Paul’s epistles be both genuine and authentic, the Christian religion is true. Think of this argument.

You close your observations in the following manner :—“ Should the Bible (meaning, as I have before remarked, the Old Testament) and Testament hereafter fall, it is not I that have been the occasion.” You look, I think, upon your production with a parent’s partial eye, when you speak of it in such a style of self-complacency. The Bible, Sir, has withstood the learning of *Porphyry*, and the power of *Julian*, to say nothing of the manichean *Faustus*—it has resisted the genius of *Bolingbroke*, and the wit of *Voltaire*, to say nothing of a numerous herd of inferior assailants—and it will not fall by your force. You have barbed anew the blunted arrows of former adversaries ; you have feathered them with blasphemy and ridicule ; dipped them
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in your deadliest poison ; aimed them with your utmost skill ; shot them against the shield of faith with your utmost vigour ; but, like the feeble javelin of aged *Priam*, they will scarcely reach the mark, will fall to the ground without a stroke.



Letter X.

S I R,

THE remaining part of your work can hardly be made the subject of animadversion. It principally consists of unsupported assertions, abusive appellations, illiberal sarcasms, *strifes of words, profane babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called*. I am hurt at being, in mere justice to the subject, under the necessity of using such harsh language ; and am sincerely sorry that, from what cause I know not, your mind has received a wrong bias in every point respecting revealed religion. You are capable of better things ; for there is a philosophical sublimity in some of your ideas, when you speak of the Supreme Being, as the creator of the universe. That you may not accuse me of disrespect, in passing over any part of your work without bestowing proper attention upon it, I will wait upon you through what you call your conclusion.

You refer your reader to the former part of the Age of Reason ; in which you have spoken of what you esteem three frauds—mystery, miracle, and prophecy. I have not at hand the book to which you refer, and know not what you have said on these subjects ; they are subjects

jects of great importance, and we, probably, should differ essentially in our opinion concerning them ; but, I confess, I am not sorry to be excused from examining what you have said on these points. The specimen of your reasoning, which is now before me, has taken from me every inclination to trouble either my reader, or myself, with any observations on your former book.

You admit the possibility of God's revealing his will to man ; yet " the thing so revealed," you say, " is revelation to the person only to whom it is made ; his account of it to another is not revelation." This is true ; his account is simple testimony. You add, there is no " possible criterion to judge of the truth of what he says." This I positively deny ; and contend, that a real miracle, performed in attestation of a revealed truth, is a certain criterion by which we may judge of the truth of that attestation. I am perfectly aware of the objections which may be made to this position ; I have examined them with care ; I acknowledge them to be of weight ; but I do not speak unadvisedly, or as wishing to dictate to other men, when I say, that I am persuaded the position is true. So thought Moses, when, in the matter of Korah, he said to the Israelites—" If these men die the common death of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me." So thought Elijah, when he said, " Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant ;"—and the people before whom he spake, were of the same opinion ; for, when the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, they said—" The Lord, he is the God." So thought our Saviour, when he said,

“The works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me;”—and, “If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.” What reason have we to believe Jesus speaking in the gospel, and to disbelieve Mahomet speaking in the Koran? Both of them lay claim to a divine commission; and yet we receive the words of the one as a revelation from God, and we reject the words of the other as an imposture of man. The reason is evident; Jesus established his pretensions, not by alleging any secret communication with the Deity, but by working numerous and indubitable miracles in the presence of thousands, and which the most bitter and watchful of his enemies could not disallow; but Mahomet wrought no miracles at all. Nor is a miracle the only criterion by which we may judge of the truth of a revelation. If a series of prophets should, through a course of many centuries, predict the appearance of a certain person, whom God would, at a particular time, send into the world for a particular end; and at length a person should appear, in whom all the predictions were minutely accomplished; such a completion of prophecy would be a criterion of the truth of that revelation, which that person should deliver to mankind. Or if a person should now say, (as many false prophets have said, and are daily saying,) that he had a commission to declare the will of God; and, as a proof of his veracity, should predict—that, after his death, he would rise from the dead on the third day; the completion of such a prophecy would, I presume, be a sufficient criterion of the truth of what this man might have said concerning the will of God. Now I tell you, (says Je-
sus

fus to his disciples, concerning Judas, who was to betray him,) before it come, that when it is come to pass ye may believe that I am he. In various parts of the gospels our Saviour, with the utmost propriety, claims to be received as the messenger of God, not only from the miracles which he wrought, but from the prophecies which were fulfilled in his person, and from the predictions which he himself delivered. Hence, instead of there being no criterion by which we may judge of the truth of the Christian revelation, there are clearly three. It is an easy matter to use an indecorous flippancy of language in speaking of the Christian religion, and with a supercilious negligence to class Christ and his apostles amongst the impostors who have figured in the world; but it is not, I think, an easy matter for any man, of good sense and sound erudition, to make an impartial examination into any one of the three grounds of Christianity which I have here mentioned, and to reject it.

What is it, you ask, the Bible teaches?—The prophet Micah shall answer you: it teaches us—“to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God;”—justice, mercy, and piety, instead of what you contend for—rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it, you demand, the Testament teaches us? You answer your question—to believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman. Absurd and impious assertion! No, Sir, no; this profane doctrine, this miserable stuff, this blasphemous perversion of scripture, is your doctrine, not that of the New Testament. I will tell you the lesson which it teaches to infidels as well as believers; it is a lesson which philosophy never taught,

taught, which wit cannot ridicule, nor sophistry disprove; the lesson is this—"The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live;—all that are in their graves shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

The moral precepts of the gospel are so well fitted to promote the happiness of mankind in this world, and to prepare human nature for the future enjoyment of that blessedness, of which, in our present state, we can form no conception, that I had no expectation they would have met with your disapprobation. You say, however,—“As to the scraps of morality that are irregularly and thinly scattered in those books, they make no part of the pretended thing, revealed religion.” “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” Is this a scrap of morality? Is it not rather the concentrated essence of all ethics, the vigorous root from which every branch of moral duty towards each other may be derived? Duties, you know, are distinguished by moralists into duties of perfect and imperfect obligation: does the Bible teach you nothing, when it instructs you, that this distinction is done away? when it bids you “put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any?” These, and precepts such as these, you will in vain look for in the codes of *Frederic*, or *Justinian*; you cannot find them in our statute books; they were not taught, nor are they taught in the schools of
heathen

heathen philosophy ; or, if some one or two of them should chance to be glanced at by a Plato, a Seneca, or a Cicero, they are not bound upon the consciences of mankind by any sanction. It is in the gospel, and in the gospel alone, that we learn their importance ; acts of benevolence and brotherly love may be to an unbeliever voluntary acts, to a Christian they are indispensable duties. Is a new commandment no part of revealed religion ? “ A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another :” the law of Christian benevolence is enjoined us by Christ himself in the most solemn manner, as the distinguishing badge of our being his disciples.

Two precepts you particularize as inconsistent with the dignity and the nature of man—that of not resenting injuries, and that of loving enemies. Who but yourself ever interpreted literally the proverbial phrase—“ If a man smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also ?” Did Jesus himself turn the other cheek when the officer of the high priest smote him ? It is evident, that a patient acquiescence under slight personal injuries is here enjoined ; and that a proneness to revenge, which instigates men to savage acts of brutality, for every trifling offence, is forbidden. As to loving enemies, it is explained, in another place, to mean, the doing them all the good in our power ; “ If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink ;” and what think you is more likely to preserve peace, and to promote kind affections amongst men, than the returning good for evil ? Christianity does not order us to love in proportion to the injury—it does not “ offer a premium for a crime,”—it orders us to let our

benevolence extend alike to all, that we may emulate the benignity of God himself, who maketh "his sun to rise on the evil and on the good."

In the law of Moses, retaliation for deliberate injuries had been ordained—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. *Aristotle*, in his treatise of morals, says, that some thought retaliation of personal wrongs an equitable proceeding; *Rhadamanthus* is said to have given it his sanction; the decemviral laws allowed it; the common law of England did not forbid it; and it is said to be still the law of some countries, even in Christendom: but the mild spirit of Christianity absolutely prohibits, not only the retaliation of injuries, but the indulgence of every resentful propensity.

"It has been," you affirm, "the scheme of the Christian church to hold man in ignorance of the Creator, as it is of government to hold him in ignorance of his rights." I appeal to the plain sense of any honest man to judge whether this representation be true in either particular. When he attends the service of the church, does he discover any design in the minister to keep him in ignorance of his Creator? Are not the public prayers in which he joins, the lessons which are read to him, the sermons which are preached to him, all calculated to impress upon his mind a strong conviction of the mercy, justice, holiness, power, and wisdom of the one adorable God, blessed forever? By these means, which the Christian church hath provided for our instruction, I will venture to say, that the most unlearned congregation of Christians in Great Britain have more just and sublime conceptions of the Creator, a more per-

fect knowledge of their duty towards him, and a stronger inducement to the practice of virtue, holiness, and temperance, than all the philosophers of all the heathen countries in the world ever had, or now have. If, indeed, your scheme should take place, and men should no longer believe their Bible, then would they soon become as ignorant of the Creator, as all the world was when God called Abraham from his kindred; and as all the world, which has had no communication with either Jews or Christians, now is. Then would they soon bow down to stocks and stones, kiss their hand (as they did in the time of Job, and as the poor African does now,) to *the moon walking in brightness, and deny the God that is above*; then would they worship Jupiter, Bacchus, and Venus, and emulate, in the transcendant flagitiousness of their lives, the impure morals of their gods.

What design has government, to keep men in ignorance of their rights? None whatever. All wise statesmen are persuaded, that the more men know of their rights, the better subjects they will become. Subjects, not from necessity but choice, are the firmest friends of every government. The people of Great Britain are well acquainted with their natural and social rights; they understand them better than the people of any other country do; they know that they have a right to be free, not only from the capricious tyranny of any one man's will, but from the more afflicting despotism of republican factions; and it is this very knowledge which attaches them to the constitution of their country. I have no fear that the people should know too much of their rights; my fear is,
that

that they should not know them in all their relations, and to their full extent. The government does not desire that men should remain in ignorance of their rights; but it both desires, and requires, that they should not disturb the public peace, under vain pretences; that they should make themselves acquainted, not merely with the rights, but with the duties also of men in civil society. I am far from ridiculing (as some have done) the rights of man; I have long ago understood, that the poor as well as the rich, and that the rich as well as the poor, have, by nature, some rights, which no human government can justly take from them, without their tacit or express consent; and some also, which they themselves have no power to surrender to any government. One of the principal rights of man, in a state either of nature or of society, is a right of property in the fruits of his industry, ingenuity, or good fortune. Does government hold any man in ignorance of this right? So much the contrary, that the chief care of government is to declare, ascertain, modify, and defend this right; nay, it gives right, where nature gives none; it protects the goods of an intestate; and it allows a man, at his death, to dispose of that property, which the law of nature would cause to revert into the common stock. Sincerely as I am attached to the liberties of mankind, I cannot but profess myself an utter enemy to that spurious philosophy, that democratic insanity, which would equalize all property, and level all distinctions in civil society. Personal distinctions, arising from superior probity, learning, eloquence, skill, courage, and from every other excellency

excellency of talents, are the very blood and nerves of the body politic ; they animate the whole, and invigorate every part ; without them, its bones would become reeds, and its marrow water ; it would presently sink into a fetid senseless mass of corruption. Power may be used for private ends, and in opposition to the public good ; rank may be improperly conferred, and insolently sustained ; riches may be wickedly acquired, and viciously applied : but as this is neither necessarily, nor generally the case, I cannot agree with those who, in asserting the natural equality of men, spurn the instituted distinctions attending power, rank, and riches. But I mean not to enter into any discussion on this subject, farther than to say, that your crimination of government appears to me to be wholly unfounded ; and to express my hope, that no one individual will be so far misled by disquisitions on the rights of man, as to think that he has any right to do wrong, as to forget that other men have rights as well as he.

You are animated with proper sentiments of piety, when you speak of the structure of the universe. No one, indeed, who considers it with attention, can fail of having his mind filled with the supremest veneration for its Author. Who can contemplate, without astonishment, the motion of a comet, running far beyond the orb of Saturn, endeavouring to escape into the pathless regions of unbounded space, yet feeling, at its utmost distance, the attracting influence of the sun, hearing, as it were, the voice of God arresting its progress, and compelling it, after a lapse of ages, to reiterate its ancient course ?—Who can comprehend the distance of the stars
O from

from the earth, and from each other?—It is so great, that it mocks our conception; our very imagination is terrified, confounded, and lost, when we are told, that a ray of light, which moves at the rate of above ten millions of miles in a minute, will not, though emitted at this instant from the brightest star, reach the earth in less than six years. We think this earth a great globe; and we see the sad wickedness, which individuals are often guilty of, in scraping together a little of its dirt: we view, with still greater astonishment and horror, the mighty ruin which has, in all ages, been brought upon human kind, by the low ambition of contending powers, to acquire a temporary possession of a little portion of its surface. But how does the whole of this globe sink, as it were, to nothing, when we consider that a million of earths will scarcely equal the bulk of the sun; that all the stars are suns; and that millions of suns constitute, probably, but a minute portion of that material world, which God hath distributed through the immensity of space! Systems, however, of insensible matter, though arranged in exquisite order, prove only the wisdom and the power of the great Architect of nature. As percipient beings, we look for something more; for his goodness; and we cannot open our eyes without seeing it.

Every portion of the earth, sea, and air, is full of sensitive beings, capable, in their respective orders, of enjoying the good things which God has prepared for their comfort. All the orders of beings are enabled to propagate their kind; and thus provision is made for a successive continuation of happiness. Individuals yield

to the law of dissolution inseparable from the material structure of their bodies : but no gap is thereby left in existence ; their place is occupied by other individuals capable of participating in the goodness of the Almighty. Contemplations such as these fill the mind with humility, benevolence, and piety. But why should we stop here ? why not contemplate the goodness of God in the redemption, as well as in the creation of the world ? By the death of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, he hath redeemed the whole human race from the eternal death, which the transgression of Adam had entailed on all his posterity. You believe nothing about the transgression of Adam. The history of Eve and the serpent excites your contempt ; you will not admit that it is either a real history, or an allegorical representation of death entering into the world through sin, through disobedience to the command of God. Be it so. You find, however, that death doth reign over all mankind, by whatever mean it was introduced : this is not a matter of belief, but of lamentable knowledge. The New Testament tells us, that, through the merciful dispensation of God, Christ hath overcome death, and restored man to that immortality which Adam had lost : this also you refuse to believe. Why ? Because you cannot account for the propriety of this redemption. Miserable reason ! stupid objection ! What is there that you can account for ? Not for the germination of a blade of grass, not for the fall of a leaf of the forest—and will you refuse to eat of the fruits of the earth, because God has not given you wisdom equal to his own ? Will you refuse to lay hold on immortality, because he

he has not given you, because he, probably, could not give to such a being as man; a full manifestation of the end for which he designs him, nor of the means requisite for the attainment of that end? What father of a family can make level to the apprehension of his infant children, all the views of happiness which his paternal goodness is preparing for them? How can he explain to them the utility of reproof, correction, instruction, example, of all the various means by which he forms their minds to piety, temperance, and probity? We are children in the hand of God; we are in the very infancy of our existence; just separated from the womb of eternal duration; it may not be possible for the Father of the universe to explain to us (infants in apprehension!) the goodness and the wisdom of his dealings with the sons of men. What qualities of mind will be necessary for our well-doing through all eternity, we know not; what discipline in this infancy of existence may be necessary for generating these qualities, we know not; whether God could or could not, consistently with the general good, have forgiven the transgression of Adam, without any atonement, we know not; whether the malignity of sin be not so great, so opposite to the general good, that it cannot be forgiven whilst it exists, that is, whilst the mind retains a propensity to it, we know not: so that if there should be much greater difficulty in comprehending the mode of God's moral government of mankind than there really is, there would be no reason for doubting of its rectitude. If the whole human race be considered as but one small member of a large community of free and intelligent

intelligent beings of different orders, and if this whole community be subject to discipline and laws productive of the greatest possible good to the whole system, then may we still more reasonably suspect our capacity to comprehend the wisdom and goodness of all God's proceedings in the moral government of the universe.

You are lavish in your praise of deism; it is so much better than atheism, that I mean not to say any thing to its discredit; it is not, however, without its difficulties. What think you of an uncaused cause of every thing? of a Being who has no relation to time, not being older to-day than he was yesterday, nor younger to-day than he will be to-morrow? who has no relation to space, not being a part here and a part there, or a whole any where? What think you of an omniscient Being, who cannot know the future actions of a man? Or, if his omniscience enables him to know them, what think you of the contingency of human actions? And if human actions are not contingent, what think you of the morality of actions, of the distinction between vice and virtue, crime and innocence, sin and duty? What think you of the infinite goodness of a Being, who existed through eternity, without any emanation of his goodness manifested in the creation of sensitive beings? Or, if you contend that there has been an eternal creation, what think you of an effect coeval with its cause, of matter not posterior to its Maker? What think you of the existence of evil, moral and natural, in the work of an infinite Being, powerful, wise, and good? What think you of the gift of freedom of will, when the abuse of freedom

becomes the cause of general misery? I could propose to your consideration a great many other questions of a similar tendency, the contemplation of which has driven not a few from deism to atheism, just as the difficulties in revealed religion have driven yourself, and some others, from Christianity to deism.

For my own part, I can see no reason why either revealed or natural religion should be abandoned, on account of the difficulties which attend either of them. I look up to the incomprehensible Maker of heaven and earth with unspeakable admiration and self-annihilation, and am a deist. I contemplate, with the utmost gratitude and humility of mind, his unsearchable wisdom and goodness in the redemption of the world from eternal death, through the intervention of his Son Jesus Christ, and am a Christian. As a deist, I have little expectation. As a Christian, I have no doubt of a future state. I speak for myself, and may be in an error, as to the ground of the first part of this opinion. You, and other men, may conclude differently. From the inert nature of matter—from the faculties of the human mind—from the apparent imperfection of God's moral government of the world—from many modes of analogical reasoning, and from other sources, some of the philosophers of antiquity did collect, and modern philosophers may, perhaps, collect a strong probability of a future existence; and not only of a future existence, but (which is quite a distinct question) of a future state of retribution, proportioned to our moral conduct in this world. Far be it from me to loosen any of the obligations to virtue; but I must confess, that

that I cannot, from the same sources of argumentation, derive any positive assurance on the subject. Think then with what thankfulness of heart I receive the Word of God, which tells me, that though "in Adam (by the condition of our nature) all die;" yet "in Christ (by the covenant of grace) shall all be made alive." I lay hold on "eternal life as the gift of God through Jesus Christ;" I consider it not as any appendage to the nature I derive from Adam, but as the free gift of the Almighty, through his Son, whom he hath constituted Lord of all, the Saviour, the Advocate, and the Judge of human kind.

"Deism," you affirm, "teaches us, without the possibility of being mistaken, all that is necessary or proper to be known." There are three things, which all reasonable men admit are necessary and proper to be known—the being of God—the providence of God—a future state of retribution. Whether these three truths are so taught us by deism, that there is no possibility of being mistaken concerning any of them, let the history of philosophy, and of idolatry, and superstition, in all ages and countries, determine. A volume might be filled with an account of the mistakes into which the greatest reasoners have fallen, and of the uncertainty in which they lived, with respect to every one of these points. I will advert, briefly, only to the last of them. Notwithstanding the illustrious labours of *Gassendi*, *Cudworth*, *Clarke*, *Baxter*, and of above two hundred other modern writers on the subject, the *natural* mortality or immortality of the human soul is as little understood by us, as it was by the philosophers of Greece.

Greece or Rome. The opposite opinions of *Plato* and of *Epicurus*, on this subject, have their several supporters amongst the learned of the present age, in Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, in every enlightened part of the world ; and they who have been most seriously occupied in the study of the question concerning a future state, as deducible from the nature of the human soul, are least disposed to give from reason a positive decision of it either way. The importance of revelation is by nothing rendered more apparent, than by the discordant sentiments of learned and good men (for I speak not of the ignorant and immoral) on this point. They shew the insufficiency of human reason, in a course of above two thousand years, to unfold the mysteries of human nature, and to furnish, from the contemplation of it, any assurance of the quality of our future condition. If you should ever become persuaded of this insufficiency, (and you can scarce fail of becoming so, if you examine the matter deeply,) you will, if you act rationally, be disposed to investigate, with seriousness and impartiality, the truth of Christianity. You will say of the gospel, as the *Northumbrian* heathens said of *Paulinus*, by whom they were converted to the Christian religion—"The more we reflect on the nature of our soul, the less we know of it. Whilst it animates our body, we may know some of its properties ; but when once separated, we know not whither it goes, or from whence it came. Since, then, the *gospel* pretends to give us clearer notions of these matters, we ought to hear it, and laying aside all passion and prejudice, follow that which shall appear most conformable to right reason."

What

What a blessing is it to beings, with such limited capacities as ours confessedly are, to have God himself for our instructor in every thing which it much concerns us to know ! We are principally concerned in knowing—not the origin of arts, or the recondite depths of science—not the histories of mighty empires desolating the globe by their contentions—not the subtleties of logic, the mysteries of metaphysics, the sublimities of poetry, or the niceties of criticism. These, and subjects such as these, properly occupy the learned leisure of a few ; but the bulk of human kind have ever been, and must ever remain, ignorant of them all ; they must, of necessity, remain in the same state with that which a German emperor voluntarily put himself into, when he made a resolution, bordering on barbarism, that he would never read a printed book. We are all, of every rank and condition, equally concerned in knowing—what will become of us after death ;—and, if we are to live again, we are interested in knowing—whether it be possible for us to do any thing whilst we live here, which may render that future life an happy one. Now, “ that thing called Christianity,” as you scoffingly speak—that last best gift of Almighty God, as I esteem it, the gospel of Jesus Christ, has given us the most clear and satisfactory information on both these points. It tells us, what deism never could have told us, that we shall certainly be raised from the dead—that, whatever be the nature of the soul, we shall certainly live for ever—and that, whilst we live here, it is possible for us to do much towards the rendering that everlasting life an happy one. These are
tremendous

tremendous truths to bad men ; they cannot be received and reflected on with indifference by the best ; and they suggest to all such a cogent motive to virtuous action, as deism could not furnish even to *Brutus* himself.

Some men have been warped to infidelity by viciousness of life ; and some may have hypocritically professed Christianity from prospects of temporal advantage : but, being a stranger to your character, I neither impute the former to you, nor can admit the latter as operating on myself. The generality of unbelievers are such, from want of information on the subject of religion ; having been engaged from their youth in struggling for worldly distinction, or perplexed with the incessant intricacies of business, or bewildered in the pursuits of pleasure, they have neither ability, inclination, nor leisure, to enter into critical disquisitions concerning the truth of Christianity. Men of this description are soon startled by objections which they are not competent to answer ; and the loose morality of the age (so opposite to Christian perfection !) co-operating with their want of scriptural knowledge, they presently get rid of their nursery faith, and are seldom sedulous in the acquisition of another founded, not on authority, but sober investigation. Presuming, however, that many deists are as sincere in their belief as I am in mine, and knowing that some are more able, and all as much interested as myself, to make a rational inquiry into the truth of revealed religion, I feel no propensity to judge uncharitably of any of them. They do not think as I do, on a subject surpassing all others in importance ; but they are not, on that account,

account, to be spoken of by me with asperity of language, to be thought of by me as persons alienated from the mercies of God. The gospel has been offered to their acceptance; and, from whatever cause they reject it, I cannot but esteem their situation to be dangerous. Under the influence of that persuasion I have been induced to write this book. I do not expect to derive from it either fame or profit; these are not improper incentives to honourable activity; but there is a time of life when they cease to direct the judgment of thinking men. What I have written will not, I fear, make any impression on you; but I indulge an hope, that it may not be without its effect on some of your readers. Infidelity is a rank weed, it threatens to overspread the land; its root is principally fixed amongst the great and opulent, but you are endeavouring to extend the malignity of its poison through all the classes of the community. There is a class of men for whom I have the greatest respect, and whom I am anxious to preserve from the contamination of your irreligion—the merchants, manufacturers, and tradesmen of the kingdom. I consider the influence of the example of this class as essential to the welfare of the community. I know that they are in general given to reading, and desirous of information on all subjects. If this little book should chance to fall into their hands after they have read yours, and they should think that any of your objections to the authority of the Bible have not been fully answered, I entreat them to attribute the omission to the brevity which I have studied; to my desire of avoiding learned disquisitions; to my inadvertency; to my

my inability; to any thing rather than to an impossibility of completely obviating every difficulty you have brought forward. I address the same request to such of the youth of both sexes, as may unhappily have imbibed, from your writings, the poison of infidelity; beseeching them to believe, that all their religious doubts may be removed, though it may not have been in my power to answer, to their satisfaction, all your objections. I pray God that the rising generation of this land may be preserved from that "evil heart of unbelief," which has brought ruin on a neighbouring nation; that neither a neglected education, nor domestic irreligion, nor evil communication, nor the fashion of a licentious world, may ever induce them to forget, that religion alone ought to be their rule of life.

In the conclusion of my *Apology for Christianity*, I informed Mr. Gibbon of my extreme aversion to public controversy. I am now twenty years older than I was then, and I perceive that this my aversion has increased with my age. I have, through life, abandoned my little literary productions to their fate: such of them as have been attacked, have never received any defence from me; nor will this receive any, if it should meet with your public notice, or with that of any other man.

Sincerely wishing that you may become a partaker of that faith in revealed religion, which is the foundation of my happiness in this world, and of all my hopes in another, I bid you farewell.

R. LANDAFF.

EXAMINATION
OF THE
AGE OF REASON,
OR AN
INVESTIGATION OF TRUE AND FABULOUS
THEOLOGY,
BY THOMAS PAINE.

BY GILBERT WAKEFIELD, B.A.
LATE FELLOW OF JESUS-COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

Nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri,
Quo me cunque rapit tempestas, deferor pospes.
HORACE

A little Learning is a dangerous Thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring.
There shallow Draughts intoxicate the Brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again. POPE.

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—1794.—



TO THE
FRIENDS OF RELIGION, REFORMATION,
AND UNIVERSAL PEACE,
OF EVERY DENOMINATION,
AND PARTICULARLY TO THE
SOCIETIES OF GREAT-BRITAIN
AND IRELAND,
ASSOCIATED
FOR THESE GOD-LIKE PURPOSES;
THIS DEFENCE
OF THE
RELIGION OF JESUS
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEVOTED
BY THE AUTHOR.

A N
E X A M I N A T I O N
OF THE
A G E O F R E A S O N, &c.

THAT the former writings of *Thomas Faine* abound with indications of original conception and profound thought, of comprehension and sagacity, far beyond the vigour of vulgar minds, no man, I presume, of character for intelligence and integrity will venture to deny. To the authority of venal sycophants, and all the retainers of corrupt and wicked systems, whether in *politics* or *religion*, no competency can be allowed in a decision upon this subject: but, on the contrary, the virulence of their abuse is in itself no unequivocal symptom of extraordinary merit: just as the screams and tumult of the feathered tribe prove some bird of nobler presence and more ample pinion to be approaching. The work, which I have undertaken to examine, is entitled to particular respect from the circumstances of its composition. It is the effusion of a pregnant intellect, sobered by the meditations of a solitary prison, not unattended probably by some apprehensions of such a catastrophe, as a crisis

of things so novel and eventful, may daily and hourly be expected to produce. The reflections therefore of such a season, from so popular a name, on a subject of such universal interest, is secure, we may presume, of considerable attention in this country, from those who are occupied in the discussion of their *civil and religious creed*: a number which has certainly increased of late with surprising rapidity, and will, I hope and believe, go on encreasing with an accelerated progress. On this account, I conceived myself not unlikely to serve the cause of revealed truth by an examination of a deistical pamphlet, which seemed so fair a candidate for extensive circulation: and I felt the more inclination to this task, not from an arrogant persuasion of superior knowledge and abilities, but from a clear conviction, that *Christianity* CANNOT be vindicated adequately and consistently against *Deism* by any slave of *systems* and *establishments*; well aware in the mean time, that all my zeal for *Christianity* will not screen me from the malice of those, who love *church-encumbrances* better than *scripture-truth*; because an opportunity will arise of exposing the trumpery and nonsense of *ecclesiastics*.

The time is come, when all our opinions must be tried at the touchstone of severe enquiry: and, if the *Jewish* and *Christian* revelations cannot support themselves against the batteries of their assailants, in the estimation of capable and disinterested judges, the outposts must be abandoned; and a retreat secur-

ed to the fortresses of *deism*, already occupied by the patriarchs of old, and the illustrious philosophers of later times. The sway of *creeds* and *councils*, of *hierarchies* and *churches*, whether *Protestant* or *Popish*, over the bodies and consciences of men, is diminishing apace: and the temple of revelation, deprived of the mouldering props, which priestcraft, and tyranny, and superstition had framed for it's support, must repose solely on it's proper basis, the adamant of TRUTH.

After premising a short introduction, explanatory of his motives to this work, our ingenious author delivers his creed :

“ I believe in one God, and no more ; and
“ I hope for happiness beyond this life.”

I join the writer in assent to these articles of faith. That *Creed of Christian Churches*, which acknowledges Jesus Christ also to be God, and the Holy Spirit to be God, is a fundamental violation of all theology ; a doctrine, alike unknown to the Heathens and Jews, and contemplated with abhorrence by the followers of Moses from it's first propagation to this very day : a doctrine, inconsistent with the plainest declarations of Christ himself and his apostles ; a doctrine, which no human testimony whatever could render credible ; a doctrine, which will happily prove a mill-stone of destruction to all *political* establishments of *christianity*.

Our author thus proceeds in his confession:
“ I believe the equality of man, and I believe
“ that religious duties consist in doing justice,
“ loving mercy, and endeavouring to make
“ our fellow-creatures happy.”

All diversity of *civil privileges* and *titular distinctions* ; all inequality, but the transient and casual inequality produced by personal exertion, public benefit, or private worth, is destitute of even the shadow of support from nature or revelation. We are all children of one common father : and Jesus of Nazareth allowed no pre-eminence among his disciples, but that of mutual subjection, condescending service, profound humility, and self-abasement ;* of which lowly virtues he proposed himself as a complete example. It requires but a trivial portion of sagacity to discover, that certain orders and descriptions of frail creatures, encompassed with every inducement to be corrupt *themselves*, and plentifully furnished with every means of corrupting *others*, cannot be peculiarly calculated to promote the general happiness of mankind ; and this happiness we are compelled to regard as the prime object of the divine administration. It was a beautiful sentiment of Plato,† that “ the affairs of states
“ would never be well conducted, ’till philosophers were kings, or kings philosophers.” He, who vindicates corruption in society, and discountenances a progress to all perfection, of

* Matthew, xx. 25—29. Romans, xii. 2. Ephesians, v. 24. 2 Peter, v. 5.—† Dial. v. Republica.

which humanity is capable, from the stale topic of the inevitable depravity of human beings, discourages every effort for virtuous pre-eminence, degrades the dignity of our nature, libels his species, and thwarts the measures of divine government. *Christians* at least might be expected to bestow some readiness in their attempts of conforming to the injunctions of their divine teachers, by striving to be *perfect*,* *and thoroughly furnished unto all good works* by “leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and going on unto *perfection*.”† In our present state of embarrassment and degradation from a thousand causes, it were presumptuous ignorance, bordering on profaneness, to prescribe a limit to the capacities of morality, either in moral or intellectual exertion. He at least cannot be deemed *unfriendly* to his species, or contemptuous to the divinity, who thinks respectably of the workmanship of God, of the rational image of his Creator.

Again : “ I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church.”

This too may be conceded, if by “ the creed of the Protestant church,” be meant that monstrous farrago of absurdities and contra-

* Philippians, iii. 12. 2 Tim. iii. 17.—† Hebrews, vi. 1.

dictions, concentrated with most ingenious and comprehensive brevity, in the *creeds* denominated the *Athanasian* and *Nicene*; which, without the expedient of repeating backwards, would

——— “ with a vengeance send,

“ From Media post to Egypt”*

a much more untractable dæmon than Asinodæus :† or, if some clauses even of the *Apostle's creed* were intended by our author; clauses, which may be found indeed in the liturgies of established churches, but are certainly not “ written in the book of life.”

“ All national institutions of churches,
“ whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, ap-
“ pear to me no other than human inventions
“ set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and
“ monopolize power and profit.”

A just remark, concisely and pregnantly expressed. *National churches* are that *hay and stubble*‡ which might be removed without difficulty or confusion, from the fabric of religion, by the gentle hand of reformation, but which the infatuation of *ecclesiastics* will leave to be destroyed *by fire*.§ *National churches* are that incrustation, which has enveloped, by gradual concretion, the diamond of christianity; nor can, I fear, the genuine lustre be restored, but by such violent efforts as the sepa-

* *Paradise Lost*, iv. 170.—† The creed of the holy Bishop Athanasius, till I am better informed, is of too hard a digestion for my charity. Dryden's preface of his *Religio Laici*.

‡ 1 Corinthians, iii. 12.—§ verse 13.

ration of substances so long and closely connected must inevitably require.

Nor can I forbear the quotation of another paragraph, replete with manly sense and dignified morality, conveyed in simple, but energetic language ; though not immediately pertinent to the discussion, which I have in view ; especially as fewer occasions of approbation and coincidence will be presented in our progress through the pamphlet.

“ It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief; if I may so express it, that mental lying has produced in society. When a man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind, as to subscribe his professional belief to things he does not believe, he has prepared himself for the commission of every other crime. He takes up the trade of a priest for the sake of gain, and in order to *qualify* himself for that trade, he begins with a perjury. Can we conceive any thing more destructive to morality than this ?”

These very rational and important observations are applicable in the fullest latitude to the *subscriptions* exacted from young men at our Universities for *degrees*, and for the candidates for the ministry in the church of England. It is a most shocking reflection to every lover of truth and honesty, that a requisition to acknowledge a multitudinous mass of theological and political propositions, denominated *articles of religion*, which many have

never read, and which they, who read, cannot understand ; that an assent, I say, to such a monstrous and unintelligible hodge podge of scholastic reveries should be made an indispensable condition to the privilege of preaching the *truths* of *christianity*. The simplicity and sincerity of the gospel cannot fail of furtherance and support, beyond all controversy, from those who begin their godly functions in such trifling with veracity and the solemnity of oaths ! who thus bind themselves to the belief of certain tenets manufactured and imposed by others ; and thereby preclude themselves (in addition to the indirect impediment in the way of acquiring truth, interposed by this unequivocal declaration of indifference to her interests) from pursuing their theological inquiries beyond the limits assigned by councils and parliaments in former days, by an express obligation not to exceed the knowledge of their fore-fathers, nor to dispute their opinions, whether true or false. I cannot myself conceive a case more palpably immoral and indefensible : nor can we be surpris'd at a plentiful harvest of *unbelievers* in a vineyard cultivated by labourers of this complexion.

“ Every national church or religion has
“ established itself by pretending some special
“ mission from God communicated to certain
“ individuals. The Jews have their Moses ;
“ the Christians their Jesus Christ, their apostles
“ and saints ; and the Turks their Mahomet ;
“ as if the way to God was not open
“ to every man alike.”

This statement is frivolous and erroneous in the extreme. The system of Jesus Christ proceeds upon the very supposition here instituted, that “the way to God is open to every man alike ;” as might be proved by many passages in the christian scriptures. What the Jews and Christians maintain in behalf of their respective systems, is : that their founders delivered to mankind rational sentiments of the Divine nature, of his existence, and his providential government of the world, at a time, when ignorance and depravation, with respect to these fundamental canons of religious rectitude, were almost universally predominant. With relation to the writings of the Jews, it is altogether undeniable, and is a truth of the utmost weight and magnitude, that our accumulated discoveries in science and philosophy, and all our progress in other parts of knowledge, has not enabled the wisest of the moderns to excel the noble sentiments conveyed in the didactics and devotional compositions of the Old Testament ; compositions, many of which existed, without dispute, before the earliest writings of heathen antiquity, and at a period, when even those illustrious instructors of mankind, the Greeks and Romans, were barbarous and unknown. It would gratify me much, I confess, to be informed in what manner the contemners of the Jews and of the Mosaic system account for this singular *phenomenon* : which indeed might be stated with abundantly more fullness and cogency, if it were necessary on this occasion. Will Tho-

mas Paine the *deist*, or any of our modern *atheists*, undertake the solution of this difficulty?— Besides, let any man compare the simple morality and the noble precepts of the gospel, as they relate to the attributes of God and the duties of humanity, with the monstrous theology, with the subtleties and the contradictory schemes of contemporary moralists, among the Greeks and Romans; (who nevertheless had, in all probability, profited mediately or immediately by the Jewish system, which could not exist without diffusing some influence through the neighbourhood) and reflect at the same time, that a perfect manual of morality may be collected from a few pages in the gospel, but must be picked in Pagan writers from a multitude of discordant volumes, and a mass of incoherency and absurdity: and then condescend to furnish an explanation of what must be allowed on all hands a surprising fact; namely, the existence of such superior intelligence in a Jewish carpenter at Nazareth. So then, though we concede to Mr. Paine, that “the way to God was open to every man alike,” we affirm of the Jewish and Christian dispensations, that *they* only were *this way* to any man desirous of entertaining rational notions of God and human duty. Without the illumination, which has been distributed through the world from these dispensations, Thomas Paine, and other *deists* of our own and succeeding ages, who fancy themselves so very philosophical and intelligent in their theology, would have known full as little of the matter, to speak with mo-

deration, as much wiser heads than their's, among the illustrious nations of antiquity, deprived of these advantages, so much contemned and so ungratefully enjoyed. The natural inference from these indubitable positions is clearly *some* degree of supernatural communication, which we style *Revelation*, to the founders of *Judaism* and *Christianity*, *Moses* and *Jesus*; and the denial of such communication leaves a problem, I apprehend, of much more arduous solution; but which we may now expect the wonderful disciples of modern reason to explain in a way, that will leave no further difficulties on the subject.

“ As it is necessary to affix right ideas to
 “ words, I will, before I proceed further in-
 “ to the subject, offer some observations on
 “ the word *revelation*. Revelation when ap-
 “ plied to religion, means something com-
 “ municated *immediately* from God to man.”
 “ No one will deny or dispute the power of
 “ the Almighty to make such a communica-
 “ tion if he pleases. But admitting for the
 “ sake of a case, that something has been re-
 “ vealed to a certain person, and not revealed
 “ to any other person, it is revelation to that
 “ person only. When he tells it to a second
 “ person, a second to a third, a third to a
 “ fourth, and so on, it ceases to be a revela-
 “ tion to all those persons. It is revelation
 “ to the first person only, and *hearsay* to eve-
 “ ry other; and consequently they are not
 “ obliged to believe it.”

This statement also is inaccurate, fallacious, and inconclusive. Let us see, if we can exhibit a rational and unexceptionable representation of the point in question. A revelation is made to one person in the first instance; *Moses*, for example. He communicates this revelation to a *second* party, his countrymen, the children of *Israel*. But does he expect them to believe this message on a mere assertion, so that their assent may be stiled a *bearsay* revelation? No such thing. He delivers his credentials with the message, and sanctions his pretensions by some display of supernatural agency. Whether such display were in reality made in the case before us, is not now the question: I am only exhibiting the proposition in it's proper form, and stating the fact, as it exists, whether authentically or otherwise, in the *Mosaic* history; and hence, I think, it is abundantly manifest that *Mr. Paine's* notions of the character and condition of the Jewish and Christian revelations are so confused, as to render his account altogether unsuitable to the purpose in view, and most effectually impertinent. And this answer, I apprehend, will serve for all contained in the succeeding paragraphs, which are also wholly foreign to the subject; a mere inapplicable figment of our author's bewildered imagination.

“ It is a contradiction in terms and ideas to
 “ call any thing a revelation that comes to us
 “ at second hand, either verbally or in writ-
 “ ing. Revelation is necessarily limited to

“ the first communication. After this it is
“ only an account of something which that
“ person says was a revelation made to him ;
“ and though he may find himself obliged to
“ believe it, it cannot be incumbent on me
“ to believe it in the same manner ; for it was
“ not a revelation made to *me*, and I have only
“ his word for it that it was made to *him*.

“ When Moses told the children of Israel
“ that he received the two tables of the com-
“ mandments from the hand of God, they
“ were not obliged to believe him ; because
“ they had no other authority for it than his
“ telling them so ; and I have no other autho-
“ rity for it than some historian telling me so :
“ the commandments carrying no internal evi-
“ dence of divinity with them. They con-
“ tain some good moral precepts, such as any
“ man qualified to be a law-giver, or a legis-
“ lator could produce himself, without having
“ recourse to supernatural intervention.”

In a note our author subjoins a sarcastical reflection, with which his fancy seems not a little tickled ; and he proposes it accordingly with an air of self complacency and exultation.

“ It is, however, necessary to except the
“ declaration, which says, that God *visits the*
“ *sins of the fathers upon the children*. It is
“ contrary to every principle of moral justice.”

But nothing in reality can possibly be more feeble and inefficient than this objection.—
The belief and worship of one true God, in

opposition to a plurality of divinities and the vanities of idolatry, is the root of all genuine religion; and springs up into that stem, upon which every moral and social duty must be engrafted. Now, it is most notorious, mankind are so entirely the creatures of imitation, association, and habit, that a general prevalence of a false principle in one age has an obvious and unavoidable tendency to transmit this principle, with accumulated error and aggravation, to the age immediately succeeding.* But history and experience uniformly ascertain, that, while individuals go unpunished, large societies and communities of men at least (and to the *Jews* in their national capacity were these commandments given) are, in the regular course of divine administration, chastised for their crimes, in consequence of the eternal alliance and inseparable connection between vice and suffering: yet these crimes are not their own crimes merely, but the aggregate wickedness of *themselves* and their *progenitors*. And with unfeigned sorrow do I regret, that *Thomas Paine* should himself be a standing evidence of this immutable dispensation;—whilst he lies languishing in prison for an accidental attachment to the *Brissotine* faction, without one personal or political immorality to justify so harsh a treatment.†

* See *Horace*, Ode iii. 6. 4. 6.

Ætas parentum, pejor avis, talit
Nos nequiores; mox daturos
Progeniem vitiosiore.

† This doctrine “of visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children” was seen and acknowledged by the *heathen moralists*. So *Horace*, Od. iii. 8. 1.

Our author proceeds : “ When also I am
 “ told that a woman called the Virgin Mary,
 “ said, or gave out, that she was with child
 “ without any cohabitation with a man, and
 “ that her betrothed husband, Joseph, said,
 “ that an angel told him so, I have a right to
 “ believe them or not : such a circumstance
 “ required a much stronger evidence than their
 “ bare word for it : but we have not even this ;
 “ for neither Joseph nor Mary wrote any such
 “ matter themselves. It is only reported
 “ by others that *they said so*. It is hearsay
 “ upon hearsay, and I do not chuse to rest my
 “ belief upon such evidence.

These difficulties I concede to the *deist*, for my own part, in all their force ; they are pertinent in themselves, and of serious significancy to those whom they may concern : but as the immaculate conception of *Jesus* by the *Holy Spirit* constitutes no *essential* article of *my* creed, and certainly rests on much weaker evidence, than any other important fact of all the gospels, I leave the vindication of it to the orthodox sons of the establishment. In the mean time, as one defect of demonstration* has not impaired the general truth of the *Newtonian Philosophy*, not even in the case of that particular doctrine, the propagation of *sounds*, so an occasional interpolation of one or two groundless circumstances will not invalidate the evidences of *Christianity* : they repose on a much broader and firmer basis than that of detached facts, knavish impositions on the superstitious, and unne-

cessary miracles. For the same reason, I shall scruple to pass unnoticed the subsequent paragraphs of our antagonist, which direct their attacks on the wretched materials heaped up, for the security of usurped dominion and secular interest, by the hands of *priests* and *devotees*: a tribe of christians holden by Mr. Paine and myself in equal veneration.

“ Nothing that is here said can apply, even
 “ with the most distant disrespect, to the *rec!*
 “ character of Jesus Christ. He was a virtuous
 “ and an amiable man. The morality that
 “ he preached and practised was of the most
 “ benevolent kind; and though similar sys-
 “ tems of morality had been preached by Con-
 “ fucius, and by some of the Greek Philoso-
 “ phers many years before; by the Quakers
 “ since, and by many good men in all ages;
 “ it has not been exceeded by any.”

Of these remarks the former part is excellent: the latter was never surpassed in ignorance and absurdity. The Quakers undoubtedly, take them all in all, are, as a PRACTICAL society, the most respectable of all the religious sects that have come to my knowledge: but what can be more supremely ridiculous, than to exemplify their morality in contradistinction to that of the *gospel*; when they are one and the same? To say, moreover, of the *christian* system merely, that “ it has not been exceeded by any” system ancient or modern, is such a misconception, as candour will choose to impute, not to malignant disparagement, but to an ignorance rather of the philosophi-

cal systems of antiquity, and the comparative merits of evangelical morality ; which, I fear, Mr. Paine has not examined with a minuteness and scrupulosity, that will authorise to a conscientious reasoner such peremptory decision on the case.

I wish those heavenly maxims of Solon and the son of Sirach, *Know thyself*:—and *Understand first and then rebuke* ; were more deeply impressed on the hearts and memories of us all : that we might not impose upon ourselves *conceit for knowledge* ; upon our readers, *sophistry for argument*, and *dogmatism for intelligent conviction*.

We are now arrived at the most important parts, in my judgment, of our author's production ; to which I shall endeavour to reply directly, intelligibly, and without evasion : and, if I should prove unable to vindicate my faith in christianity upon principles truly rational and unambiguously explicit, I will relinquish it altogether, and look for an asylum in the *deism* of Thomas Paine, and the *calm philosophy* of Hume.

“ Jesus Christ wrote no account of him-
 “ self, of his birth, parentage, or any thing
 “ else. Not a line of what is called the New
 “ Testament is of his writing. The history
 “ of him is altogether the work of other peo-
 “ ple ; and as to the account given of his re-
 “ surrection and ascension, it was the necessa-
 “ ry counterpart to the story of his birth. His
 “ historians having brought him into the

“ world in a supernatural manner, were oblig-
 “ ed to take him out again in the same man-
 “ ner, or the first part of the story must have
 “ fallen to the ground.”

To this argument against the resurrection of Jesus, various answers might be instituted: but I shall confine myself to one only, which appears to my mind incapable of confutation upon any principle of philosophy or experience: and will indeed admit of no dispute, but upon positions subversive of all historical testimony whatsoever, and introductory of universal scepticism.

The numerous circumstances interspersed through the *gospel narratives* and in the *acts* of the Apostles, appertaining to the geography of countries, the position of rivers, towns, and cities, public transactions of much notoriety in those days; the dress, customs, manners, and languages of nations and individuals; political characters of eminence and their conduct, with a vast multiplicity of detached occurrences and facts, not necessary to be specified at large, challenge (to speak with moderation) as large a portion of credibility to these books, considered in the light of *historical* testimonials, as can be claimed for any writings whatever, received as a genuine, and equally ancient and multifarious. Now no mean presumption arises in favour of the most *extraordinary* transactions also, blended in the same texture of narrative by historians of so credible a character with respect to the rest of their relations: but, when these *extraordinary facts*

are found to have so intimate an incorporation with the *common* and unsuspicious occurrences of these histories so as to admit of no detachment, but to stand or fall with the main body of the compositions ; I cannot see how any historical probability of the authenticity of these *extraordinary* events can rise higher than in such an instance. But it will be proper to unfold the purport of this reasoning, which admits abundant illustration, more explicitly, by a particular example.

The apostles, Peter and John, after the death of their master, being summoned before the priests and elders of the Jews*, boldly assert in their presence, that “ God had raised Jesus “ Christ, of Nazareth, whom the Jews had “ crucified, from the dead.” After some examination and debate, the two apostles are commanded by those magistrates and rulers of the Jewish nation to teach no more in the name of Jesus. But these intrepid followers of Jesus replied in precisely the same words of Socrates to the Athenians†: “ We ought to “ obey God rather than men : for we cannot “ but speak the things which we have SEEN “ and HEARD.” And what was their prospect and expectation from this determination to perseverance ? Nothing less than ridicule, contempt, persecution, poverty, bodily chastisements, imprisonment and death :—

“ Starving their gains, and martyrdom their price.”

* Acts iv, 7.—v, 27.

† In Apol. Platonis, p. 364, ed. Ludg. Acts v, 29.—iv, 20.

Now, if we recollect in union with all this, what indeed should never be forgotten, that these apostles, the first teachers of christianity, the companions and friends of Jesus, did not endure these accumulated inconveniencies from a mere obstinate attachment to speculative opinions, in which, in my opinion, they were fallible as other men ; but for asserting the palpable unquestionable evidence of their external senses, what “ they had heard, and seen, and handled :* no alternative of delusion or fallacy can be supposed ; but their case stands clearly distinguished from that of every *future* victim to religious persuasions : liable, as they were, to no misconstruction, no precipitate and prejudiced judgments, no conceivable imposture. The falsehoods therefore of Christ’s resurrection in connection with this single fact, and all the train of collateral circumstances dependant from it, would, I am persuaded, upon any mathematical calculation of the sum of moral and historical presumption, amount to an improbability of the greatest magnitude, indefinitely approximating to a *miraculous event*.

“ The resurrection and ascension, supposing
“ them to have taken place, admitted of public
“ and ocular demonstration, like that of
“ the ascension of a balloon, or the sun at noon
“ day, to all Jerusalem at least. A thing
“ which every body is required to believe,
“ requires that the proof and evidence of it

* John, i. 1. See also Remark xli. in my Evidences of Christianity.

“ should be equal to all, and universal ; and
“ as the public visibility of this last related
“ act was the only evidence that could give
“ sanction to the former part, the whole of it
“ falls to the ground, because that evidence
“ never was given. Instead of this, a small
“ number of persons, not more than eight or
“ nine, are introduced as proxies for the whole
“ world, to say, they *saw it*, and all the rest of
“ the world are called upon to believe it. But
“ it appears that Thomas did not believe the
“ resurrection ; and, as they say, would not
“ believe, without having ocular and manual
“ demonstration himself. *So neither will I ;*
“ and the reason is equally as good for me and
“ for every other person, as for Thomas.”

Farther, The demonstration of the *resurrection* may have been sufficiently public to demand our assent, in conjunction with such a variety of corroborating coincidencies, though it were not attested by the ocular observation of all Jerusalem, which Mr. Paine supposes to be absolutely necessary to the establishment of this fact. The actual degree of publicity, however, attendant on this * transaction, according to the histories, may be learned from the texts referred to below.† Not a thousandth part of the people in Great-Britain saw Lunardi go up from the Artillery Ground in a balloon ; but the superior impulse to any possible action upon my mind, who saw him, in

* Matthew, xxviii. 9. Luke, xxiv. 13. John, xx. 19, 26.

† 1 Corinthians, xv. 5—9.

consequence of that event, does not exceed the impulse to a similar action on the mind of another, who did not see him, by an *evanescent infinitesimal* of efficacy. The man, therefore, who is resolved to believe no transaction, but upon "ocular and manual demonstration," believes his own theory in every movement of his life. I might advance also, in aid of these remarks, that mankind are most evidently placed here in a state of *probationary imperfection*; that, instead of certainty for our guide, we are compelled to trust, on most occasions, to degrees of probability infinitely diversified; and that some of our noblest and most refined excellencies, moral and intellectual, spring from a diffidence and docility and lowliness of understanding, which disputable evidence is best calculated to produce. Besides, that exercise and agitation of our mental powers, which is inevitably generated by the delays and difficulties, intervening propositions of this nature and the attainment of moral certainty, in a painful disquisition of them, contribute essentially to the clearness, and vigour, and general salubrity of the understanding: just as rivers are meliorated and refined by a winding passage over sand and gravel.* It might as well be pretended, that the faculties of man would be enlarged, and his condition improved, without the necessity of labour and ingenuity for the subsistence and well-being of common life: if the trees dropt honey into our mouths; if the land flowed with milk and nectar, as is fabled of the golden

* — fontes liquidi, atque exercita cursu
Flumina. Virg. Geo. iii. 529.

age.* The declaration, therefore, of Christ, is no fanatical ejaculation, but a position strictly philosophical and intrinsically wise : “ Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed : blessed are they, that have *not* seen, and yet have believed.”†

No considerate and inquisitive christian will pretend, that he sees the truth of his master's resurrection and the system supported by it, with the same intuition, which perceives the equality of the three angles of a triangle to two right angles. He is satisfied with thinking an acquiescence in this grand doctrine strictly rational and philosophical, if he descries it's indissoluble connection with other numerous occurrences of the highest probability ; if it forms a most important link in one concate-

* Ovid, *metam.* i. iii.

Flumina jam lectis, jam flumina nectaris, ibant ;
Flavaque de viridi stillabant ilice mella.

There is not more delightful poetry, than true philosophy in those lines of *Virgil*, *Geo.* i. 121.

————— pater ipse colendi
Haud facilem esse viam voluit ; primusque per artem
Movit agros, curis acuens mortalia corda,
Nec torpere gravi passus sua regna veterno.

“ The fire of Gods and men, with hard decrees,
Forbids our plenty to be bought with ease ;
And wills that mortal men inur'd to toil,
Should exercise, with pains, the grudging soil.
Himself invented first the shining share,
And whetted human industry by care :
Himself did handy-craft and arts ordain :
Nor suffered sloth to rust his active reign.”

DRYDEN.

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nated series of divine communications, dignified and important in themselves, corroborated by contemporary histories, and ascertained almost to demonstration by the preceding and present existing circumstances of mankind at large : if, in short, nothing can be discovered in such a system, unfit for man to receive, or the Creator to bestow ; but, on the contrary, innumerable indications present themselves of that benevolence to the human race, which is to us the most convincing characteristic of the divinity.

“ It is vain to attempt to palliate or disguise
“ this matter. The story, so far as relates to
“ the supernatural part, has every mark of
“ fraud and imposition stamped upon the face
“ of it. Who were the authors of it is as
“ impossible for us to know, as it is for us to
“ be assured, that the books in which the account is related, were written by the persons
“ whose names they bear. The best surviving
“ evidence we now have respecting this affair
“ is the Jews. They are regularly descended
“ from the people who lived in the times this
“ resurrection and ascension is said to have
“ happened, and they say, *it is not true*. It
“ has long appeared to me a strange inconsistency to cite the Jews as a proof of the
“ truth of the story. It is just the same as if
“ a man were to say, I will prove the truth
“ of what I have told you, by producing the
“ people who say it is false.”

That the story of the resurrection “ has every mark of fraud and imposition stamped up-

“ on the face of it,” is the hardy assertion of one, who must be deemed to have nothing better to offer than *hardy assertion*, ’till he presents us with a deduction of particulars in vindication of his confidence : and, if the books should *not* be written in reality by those identical persons, whose names are affixed, the truth of the facts themselves is deducible from a mass of collateral and independent evidence. And with respect to the incredulity of the Jews, many satisfactory reasons may be alledged. I have been assured indeed, and upon authority exceedingly respectable, that in the written annals of the Israelitish nation, repositied at Venice and Amsterdam, *two* miracles of Jesus stand recorded ; one of which is the resuscitation of the widow’s son at Nain :* but I would not wish this argument to pass for more than it’s proper value. It is, however, acknowledged by the Jews, that such a person as Jesus of Nazareth existed,† and at the time assigned by the Evangelists : but motives numerous and highly probable may be suggested for their rejection of him. The Jewish nation were expecting a magnificent leader and glorious conquerer, not an obscure Nazarene and humble teacher of religion : they were at that time, as appears from their countryman Josephus, and from the Roman and Evangelical historians, a people exceedingly vicious and depraved : their leading men, with their chief priest and scribes, whose opinions and authority swayed the whole nation, according to the custom of corrupt

* Luke, vii. ii.—† See Bishop Lowth’s note on Isaiah, liii. 8.

communities, hated and reviled Jesus, not only for that simplicity and purity of life, which read a lecture of tacit reprobation to their ostentatious and immoral characters, but much more from his public and unreserved reproof of their ignorance, their tyranny, their selfishness, their extortion, and hypocrisy. Now, if it should be rejoined to these allegations (and nothing else discoverable by me can be rejoined) that *miracles*, if Jesus really performed them, would not have failed to overpower their prejudices and animosity ; I reply first, that the Jews, who admitted the possibility of working miracles by a confederacy with evil spirits, and a skill in magical operations,* would much more easily take refuge in that popular solution, than surrender their emoluments, their vices, and their religious professions, entwined as these were with great intellectual depravity ; than offer up such costly sacrifices to the name and authority of a detested Censor. And, secondly, daily experience presents us with innumerable instances of a perseverance in vice and folly, which the unhappy victims of this tyranny are in their own minds fully assured, will as inevitably terminate in wretchedness and destruction, as if the evidence of such an issue were ascertained by a *miracle*.

But the subject before us admits of further illustration from the example of Mr. Paine himself. In this country, where his opposition to the corruptions of government has rais-

* This is manifest from Josephus, as well as various passages of the New Testament.

ed him so many adversaries, and such a swarm of unprincipled hirelings have exerted themselves in blackening his character and in misrepresenting all the transactions and incidents of his life ; will it not be a most difficult, nay, an impossible task, for posterity, after a lapse of 1700 years, if such a wreck of modern literature, as that of the ancient, should intervene, to identify the real circumstances, moral and civil, of the man ? And would a true historian, such as the Evangelists, be credited at that future period against such a predominant incredulity, without large and weighty accessions of collateral attestation ? And how transcendently extraordinary, I had almost said *miraculous*, will it be esteemed, by candid and reasonable minds, that a writer, whose object was, a melioration of condition to the common people, and their deliverance from oppression, poverty, and wretchedness, to the numberless blessings of upright and equal government, should be reviled, persecuted, and burned in effigy, with every circumstance of insult and execration, by these very objects of his benevolent intentions, in every corner of the kingdom ?

Upon the whole, we find no difficulty in declaring, that what has astonished Mr. Paine so long, should astonish him no longer : as no species of reasoning is more common and more legitimate, than that which proves the truth of a circumstance from the evidence of corrupt and interested witnesses, who assert it to be false. The very denial of such a people

as the Jews is no mean presumption in favor of the character of Jesus. Indeed, Mr. Paine pleads this cause with so much ability in our favor and against himself, that I should be unpardonable in withholding the next paragraph, replete with cogency and good sense, from the notice of the reader.

“ That such a person as Jesus Christ existed, and that he was crucified, which was the mode of execution at that day, are historical relations strictly within the limits of probability. He preached most excellent morality, and the equality of man ; but he preached also against the corruptions and avarice of the Jewish priests ; and this brought upon him the hatred and vengeance of the whole order of the priest-hood.”

Mr. Paine then enters into what he calls “ a bold investigation, and which, he apprehends, will alarm many.” Upon this topic of discussion our author fancies himself, no doubt, extremely eloquent ; and, instead of plain sensible Thomas Paine, he commences a tumid and hypertragical declaimer. A most formidable and pompous representation is exhibited of the devil ; with a detail of the battles, the transformations, the imprisonment, and other strange adventures of his Satanic majesty. All this, I grant, may swell into a serious difficulty with good *churchmen* and puritanical fanatics, but to myself, and others of the same orthodox standard, occasion no embarrassment at all, being received with exactly the degree or credit vouchsafed them by

Thomas Paine himself. The whole fable of the Devil and his angels, with all it's terrific appendages, has been gratuitously fabricated by the sons of superstition from one or two emblematical passages in the Revelations, where the author has delineated future characters and events under the guise of these fictitious personages. No legitimate rules of interpretation, and no circumstances of the Jewish or Christian systems, make it necessary for us to regard the Devil, or Satan, in any other light than that of an allegorical character. This mode of personification was perfectly suited to the taste of the orientals; who delighted in speaking, not only in striking metaphors, but by actions; and whose compositions are a tissue of figurative and emblematical expression. The origin of evil, moral and natural, is a problem, which has exercised the ingenuity of man, since the creation of the world; and the Hebrews relieved the distress of mind, resulting from these disquisitions, by personifying the evil principle under the denomination of Satan, or the enemy. The Greeks also had recourse to a similar contrivance for their satisfaction on this point; and employed Até, the Furies, and other malignant deities, as convenient substitutes for the origin of evil.* Nor were similar fictions, with a view to the same embarrassment, unknown to the followers of Confucius and Zoroaster, to the natives of Peru and Mexico. But Mr. Paine's information upon the subject of modern theology

* See Homer's Iliad, xix. 87, 91.

must be very slender indeed, or he would have known, that those, who have distinguished themselves of late years by the freedom of scriptural research, unfettered by the chicanery and bribery of establishments, have exploded these monstrous doctrines, which receive no real countenance from the genius of the christian covenant, or the sense of scripture ; and will soon have no existence but in the creeds of Dames and Nurses. Alas ! our deist fancied himself in stout combat, with genuine christianity, whilst he was buffeting a mere phantom of ignorance and superstition ! So easy is declamation against folly !

“ These books, beginning with Genesis and
 “ ending with Revelations (which by the bye
 “ is a book of riddles that requires a Revela-
 “ tion to explain it) are, we are told, the word
 “ of God.”

The vindicator, who occupies himself in the confutation of such unsupported and dogmatical assertions, is not much more excusable, than the *ignoramus*, who has the audacity to produce them. I thus express myself with unreserved censure, upon a probability of the highest kind, that Mr. Paine never studied the *apocalypse* with an express view of deciding upon the authenticity of that singular composition. When he has done this, and is able to invalidate merely those incontrovertible *internal* symptoms of genuineness, which the synchronisms, the curious coincidences and arrangement of the parts, detected and elucidated with such incomparable skill and clearness by

Joseph Mede, carry with them to every dispassionate examiner, it will then be proper and seasonable to discuss the allegations of our deist. But that the random fiction of a distempered brain should be marked with such characters of truth, as are found on the face of the *apocalypse*, is to me perfectly inconceivable.

“ When the church mythologists established their system, they collected all the writings they could find, and managed them as they pleased. It is a matter altogether of uncertainty to us whether such of the writings as now appear, under the name of the Old and the New Testament, are in the same state in which those collectors, say they found them ; or whether they added, altered, abridged, or dressed them up.

“ Be this as it may, they decided by *vote* which of the books out of the collection they had made, should be the WORD OF GOD, and which should not. They rejected several ; they voted others to be doubtful, such as the books called the Apocrypha ; and those books which had a majority of votes, were voted to be the word of God. Had they voted otherwise, all the people, since calling themselves christians, had believed otherwise ; for the belief of the one comes from the vote of the other. Who the people were that did all this, we know nothing of ; they called themselves by the general name of the church ; and this is all we know of the matter.”

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In answer to this undigested and inaccurate statement of the case, I observe, as follows : It is most certain, and ought not to be dissimbled, that *all* the books of the Old and New Testaments have not come confirmed to us by the same degree of evidence. They may be properly distributed into two classes, Books of *Fact*, and Books of *Opinion*. Under the former class I would comprise from Genesis to the book of Job, with the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles ; and under the latter, to make the largest concession to this argument, the Hagiographa and Prophets, i. e. all the remainder of the Old Testament, with the Epistles and Apocalypse of the New. Now, that we may wave all discussion of the evidences and importance of the latter collection, the Christian and Jewish systems need no support beyond the authenticity of the *historic* class : and I assert in the fullest confidence, and appeal to a multitude of publications in behalf of this assertion, that no history whatever, taking it's antiquity into consideration, has more claims to be received as genuine, than the histories in question. And what need of circumstantial detail in repelling the objections of men, who really knew just nothing of the subject, and satisfy their *reason* and *philosophy* by peremptory asseveration only, unilluminated by one single ray of information on the topic in dispute ?* To contravene positions, that have been discussed again and again, by writers

* I have long had in contemplation a work relative to the authenticity of the Old Testament, similar to my *Evidences of Christianity* ; which I hope some day to execute.

of the first genius and erudition, and to disparage the genuineness of the bible histories wholly and indiscriminately, without some precision of investigation, some specific allegations, founded on the report of authentic documents, is intolerable arrogance, and the consummation of literary profligacy. With respect to the internal evidences of these histories, I am persuaded, and would engage to prove in detail, that they are exceedingly superior to those of any ancient records whatever, whose authenticity is admitted ; evidences, of which no man will doubt, who does not insist, on *mathematical demonstration*, in cases only susceptible of varying *probabilities*. However this be, it is my settled persuasion, deduced from experience and the manners of mankind, that, if no written memorials of the Jewish and Christian dispensations were at this moment in existence, the present condition of the professors of these systems, as a traduction of believers in a certain system, composing vast aggregates of men through a succession of ages, in a variety of instances persecuted, distressed, and destroyed for their belief, cannot be accounted for, but on a supposition of the original reasonableness of these dispensations, in the apprehensions of the *first* professors ; and consequently of their probable authenticity : unless indeed we are resolved to exempt the men of those æras from the common benefits of rationality. It were most easy to enlarge on this subject ; but more has been said already, than such desultory and unsubstantiated allegations have any reason to expect : and I shall only

add, from a multiplicity of cogent instances, with reference to *one* branch of evidence of the first moment, that a comparison of the xxviii. chapter of Deuteronomy only, with the subsequent and present state of the Israelitish nation, must flash conviction, I should think, upon any mind, not totally prejudiced and perverted, in favor of the *prophetical* pretensions of the *scriptures* : for that the book of Deuteronomy was composed posterior to these events, what effrontery even of unlearned deism, if it hazard the assertion, will undertake to prove ?

“ Revelation is a communication of something, which the person, to whom that thing is revealed, did not know before. For if I have done a thing, or seen it done, it needs no revelation to tell me I have done it, or seen it, nor to enable me to tell it, or to write it.”

This is not only the *essence*, but the *quintessence*, of all weakness and absurdity : and affords a melancholy instance, how men of real genius and abilities must expose themselves, when they venture to discuss subjects of the highest moment, for which they are qualified neither by reading or reflexion. Such presumption is no other than the case simply, but pointedly described by the apostle : “ professing themselves to be wise, they become fools.”* Mr. Paine has given us a notable definition truly ; in which the term to be explained

* Romans, i. 22.

constitutes a part ! But, to pass by this stupidity ; how sayest thou, child of reason ? “ Revelation is a communication of something “ unknown before.” So then, not only the professors of philosophy at the higher places of education, but every dame, that teaches the *horn-book* in a country village, communicates, it seems, a *revelation* ! And the man, who so defines and so conceives, and, upon the strength of such definition and conception, talks *about it and about it*, with all the fullness of self-sufficiency, is able, it should seem, to demolish Judaism and Christianity with a few dashes of *his* pen, and to establish mere deism on their ruins !

“ How would our fathers rise up in a rage,

“ And swear all shame is lost in GEORGE’S age !”

What our redoubtable antagonist immediately subjoins, favors of equal imbecility, and total misapprehension of the subject under contemplation. The greater part of the *bible-history* contains simply a narrative of the political occurrences of the Jews ; and the transactions recorded are, therefore, in a variety of instances to be considered in the same light with those of all other histories ; namely, as aggravated and disguised in a thousand instances by passing through the medium of national partiality. The history of Sampson is, on this account, to be credited in proportion only to that degree of probability, measured by the common experience of mankind and the state of the world in those days, which the history itself shall claim in the estimation of reasonable

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judges, under such qualifications and deductions, as will by no means invalidate the main body and the leading facts of the narrative in the light of a national register of persons and events.

I agree with Thomas Paine, that “ the account of the creation, with which the book of Genesis opens, has all the appearance of being a tradition, which the Israelites had among them before they came into Egypt; and after their departure from that country, they put it at the head of their history, without telling, as it is most probable that they did not know, how they came by it.”

But what majesty of sentiment, what a dignified simplicity of expression, characterizes the Mosaic account of the creation of the world ! Compare only this elegant and compendious relation with the strange, confused, and despicable *cosmogonies* of the Greeks : for it is manifest from internal evidence, that Ovid’s beautiful description was constructed upon the Mosaic narrative : nor, otherwise, is it probable, that the literary Romans of the Augustan age should be strangers to the Greek translation of the Old Testament.*

To all that occurs comprehending any objections to the Jewish institution, a very satisfactory answer has, if I mistake not, been al-

* Fuscus Aristius, to whom Horace addresses the 22d Ode of the first book, and his tenth epistle, one of the most intimate and beloved friends of the poet, was either a native Jew, or a Profelyte : compare Sat. i. 9. 60—72.

ready given. One predominant error it may not be unseasonable to detect.

“ Why it has been called the Mosaic account of the creation, I am at a loss to conceive. Moses, I believe, was too good a judge of such subjects to put his name to that account. He had been educated among the Egyptians, who were a people as well skilled in science, and particularly in astronomy, as any people of their day.”

All this may be literally true; but a palpable *untruth* is implied in it; that the Egyptians were really a learned and scientific people: whereas their science and astronomy was just nothing at all. If not, produce me your vouchers to this fact, from existing monuments or ancient testimony.* Political society was undoubtedly existing in much stability and regularity at a very early period in Egypt; but probably not earlier than in China and Indostan, or, perhaps, other pleasant and fertile countries of the East; but where shall we find the scientific discoveries of all, or any of these people, at the Mosaic æra? The only circumstance, which has fallen to my knowledge, that is favourable to the science of the Egyptians, but in much later ages, is that eagerness, with which the Grecian sages travelled for information to this country. But the Egyptian

* See a posthumous dissertation by *Dr. Woodward* in the *Archæologia* of the society of Antiquaries, vol. iv. dissert. 19.

priests, like priests of other ages, cajoled mankind with juggling tricks, mysterious mythologies, lying legends of gods and heroes, and an imaginary chronology dependent on pretended observations of eclipses ; and, I apprehend, the acquisitions of the Greeks from this peregrination, where no more than the general acquisitions of modern travellers, and those of Ulysses in ancient times : who, as we learn from Pope's translation of the *Odyssæy*,

“ Wandering from clime to clime, observant stray'd,

“ Their manners noted, and their states survey'd.”

The few elementary propositions in geometry, which are ascribed to Pythagoras and Plato, ought not to be imputed, in all probability, to any communications from the Egyptians ; but were the pure inventions of those most acute and god-like philosophers. Yes ; such men, as Plato and Pythagoras, would either have learned more, or have learned nothing, from the Egyptians. Not a day passes however, but authors are trumpeting the science of the Egyptians upon all occasions ; a science, which has no existence but in the misconceptions of their own brain, and the creeds of their teachers. And these deists after all, laugh at christians, forsooth ! for their credulity.

“ If we permit ourselves to conceive right
“ ideas of things, we must necessarily affix the
“ the idea, not only of unchangeableness, but
“ of the utter impossibility of any change
“ taking place, by any means or accident

“ whatever, in that which we would honor
 “ with the name of the word of God, and
 “ therefore the word of God cannot exist in
 “ any written or human language.”

What can be more frivolous or unworthy of a man of sense? A revelation, we suppose, is first conveyed to a particular person; he proposes it with the proofs of his mission to others; they transmit the same by tradition and written records to their posterity. It is acknowledged, that no succeeding evidence to future generations can strictly authorize that most indubitable conviction of the first immediate professor; but even their evidence may approximate to certainty beyond any assignable limits, so as to amount to a species of persuasion, from concurrence of corroborating particulars, which is morally irresistible. Who, even at this day, can be assured, that Michael Angelo planned the fabric of St. Peter's at Rome, or Sir Christopher Wren, St. Paul's in London, with a satisfaction equal to that of the contemporaries of these transactions? And yet, what man in his senses entertains the least doubt of these respective facts? And so it may be with respect to the Jewish and Christian revelations; and so it is, notwithstanding any arguments of Mr. Paine. A few mistakes of copyists and printers make no more alteration in the general effect of this argument, than a new stone, or pinnacle repaired, will be deemed to abolish the pretensions of the primary architect to his structure.

“ I now go on to the book called the New
“ Testament. The *new* Testament! that is,
“ the *new* Will, as if there could be two
“ wills of the Creator.”

Scarcely a single Christian can be found, I believe, so totally ignorant and untutored, as not to know, that the New Covenant is the proper title of this book. Most completely ridiculous then does Mr. Paine make himself by his serious contest with vulgar and exploded errors. A plain demonstration this, how little of what is new and important *he* has to bring forward on these long agitated disquisitions.

In the following paragraphs, not an *iota* of remark is to be discovered, that does not disgrace the meanest understanding: and no objection that a school-boy could not confute. My countrymen must be degenerated into *swinish multitude* indeed, to find any nutriment in such a mess of pigs-meat, as these wretched caterers David Andrews and Thomas Paine have provided for them. But what better can be expected from *zeal* without *knowledge*? Nothing indeed, but dogmatism, misrepresentation, nonsense, and obscurity. In short, to employ our author's own words, “ I become
“ tired with examining into the inconsistencies
“ and absurdities of Thomas Paine's effusion
“ that I hasten to the conclusion of it, in order
“ to proceed,” but on very unpromising speculation of success, “ to something better.

It is most true, as our author asserts, “ The
“ church has set up a system of religion ver

“ contradictory to the character of the person
 “ whose name it bears. It has set up a reli-
 “ gion of pomp and of revenue in pretended
 “ imitation of a person whose life was humili-
 “ ty and poverty:” yet, according to the stale
 but just maxim, whose dictates Mr. Paine has
 so incessantly and egregiously violated in his
 crude production: “ *ab abusu ad usum non va-*
 “ *let consequentia* :” these *corruptions* are not
 chargeable on the spirit of true christianity:
 the argument will not infer from perverted re-
 velation to no revelation at all. No: there
 are, we trust, such things in being, as truth,
 philosophy, and revealed religion, in spite of
 lying Chroniclers, imaginary system-mongers,
 and meretricious theologians.

Your notion of *redemption*, upon which you
 so largely expatiate and so tragically declaim
 in the following pages, is the notion derived
 probably from your *quaker* father and the good
 fraternity, among whom you received your
 education: but is not the notion of the scrip-
 tures. Our doctrine is, that God created man
 pure and upright, with a capacity of conform-
 ing himself in all respects to the injunctions
 of the divine will:* that life without cessation
 was the proposed reward of unflinching obedi-
 ence; and death the punishment of transgres-
 sion. Man deviated from the line of rectitude
 by listening to the seductions of wayward ap-
 petite; and became justly exposed to the pe-

* So *Solomon*. “ Lo! this only have I found; that God
 “ hath made man upright, but they have sought out many
 “ inventions.” Ecclesiastes, vii. 29.

nalty denounced against sin. His heavenly father, who in the midst of judgment remembers mercy, and delights, through the whole conduct of his providential administration of mankind, in deducing good from evil, renews his covenant with his fallen creatures ; promises to reverse this sentence of death, and to re-establish him in his claim to immortality by means of another dispensation at a future season, which appeared to divine wisdom the best calculated for it's promulgation. Accordingly, in the fullness of time, after a preparatory system, whose chief object was the establishment of a belief in one God, in opposition to the corruptions of idol-worship ; Jesus of Nazareth was commissioned to preach in Judea the terms of acceptance with the Almighty. These were, a belief and practice of the doctrines, which this apostle preached, and confirmed by miracles : the doctrines of unbounded mercy on the part of God upon repentance and reformation, and of universal undistinguishing benevolence on the part of man to all his brethren of the human race : principles essential in themselves to the virtue and happiness of mankind ; and therefore required as the conditions of divine favor, by this system of revelation. Thus was the inestimable privilege of immortality again indulged to the world ; and Jesus himself was propounded as the voucher of this truth. Hence manifestly appears the reason, why he did not “ die of a fever, or of the small-pox, of old

“ age,” or in any private customary manner; but by a public exhibition of death upon a cross : that he, whose resurrection had been previously appointed by himself for the test and demonstration of the whole christian system as it related to the destruction of death and the gift of immortality, might be shewn to the world unequivocally and indubitably dead.* This may be regarded as a brief abstract of the evangelical scheme of redemption according to my conception of it ; a scheme, which admits of abundant illustration and establishment from a multiplicity of considerations, conformable alike to reason, philosophy, and experience : but neither does the present occasion permit, nor the weight of Mr. Paine’s objections require, a more copious display or a more scrupulous corroboration of our creed.

Mr. Paine further says, “ Jesus Christ could speak but one language, which was Hebrew,” with as much confidence, as if he had been personally acquainted with him. Now my opinion is, that the inhabitants of Judea, and the greater part of the Roman empire, understood Greek also as well generally as the Irish understand English : but what claim have those, who decide without knowledge, to any satisfaction on this point ? My wish is to excite in the deistical lovers of truth

* See Remark, xliii. in my evidences of Christianity. Had Jesus died in any of the ways pointed out by the wisdom of Mr. Paine, we should have been called upon to clear the suspicions of collusion and imposture from the privacy of that event.

a desire to examine for themselves ; a sober estimate of their own acquirements ; and a modest persuasion, that the disciples of Christ may have some reasons, not wholly puerile and inefficient, for their attachment to their religion : and I recommend, in the mean time, to the consideration of the *atheist* (if such men really exist ; which I doubt exceedingly) what Mr. Paine observes towards the close of his pamphlet. I know not, whether Mr. Paine's remarks on the languages of the ancients can be thought worthy of any animadversion as we pass. I observe, however, that as all men have not that docility and humility of mind, which is essential to an acceptance of christianity, but wrap themselves up in a cloak of ignorance and self-sufficiency ; so neither have all that sensibility of perception, and that elegance of taste, which is necessary to a relish of the inimitable beauties of ancient composition. I may be, for example, a delicate bird, delighting in strawberries and the choicest fruits — Thomas Paine, a crow ; who prefers a feast on carrion and putrescence. The genius and faculties of men are diversified with infinite shades of texture : and it seems to be the duty of every individual to prosecute that branch of literature, with peculiar devotion, for which nature has peculiarly fitted him. Poetical inspiration and the powers of eloquence were not given by God without some wise intention, with respect both to the possessor and mankind at large.

Nec tua laudabis studia aut aliena reprehendes :

is a sensible and valuable maxim of an *Augustan* poet. The compositions of the Greeks and Romans stand as yet unrivalled in the universe; and their admirers are much conformed in their attachment, when they perceive their censurers to be those, who know little, or nothing, of the subject themselves, and scruple not to incur an imputation of most contemptible impertinence for so irrational an interposition of their judgement. Besides, I have not yet discovered that the best philologists are generally inferior in any *other* branch of knowledge to the wise-acres, who undervalue these attainments, merely because they have not the means of acquisition. Have the cultivators of the languages more natural powers therefore than other men? By no means: but their youth has been happily exercised in those pursuits, in which youth can only be occupied, very generally speaking, with complete efficiency. In all that Mr. Paine has said on this subject, I discern little more than a collection of ignorance, misconception, effrontery, and insipidity.

“ The event that served more than any
 “ other, to break the first link in this long
 “ chain of despotic ignorance, is that known
 “ by the name of the reformation by Luther.
 “ From that time, though it does not appear
 “ to have made any part of the intention of
 “ Luther, or of those who are called reform-
 “ ers, the Sciences began to revive, and Libe-

“ rality, their natural associate, began to appear.”

The reformation arose from an insight into the corruptions and absurdities of Popery, in consequence of a freedom of enquiry already commencing, and a steady conviction of servility, disgraceful to a rational being, in a submission of the understanding to the arbitrary dictates of a spiritual usurper. The reformation, therefore, by Luther was only one circumstance in the recovery of the natural right of man, to think and determine for himself. But the benefits of the reformation were momentous and extensive; and particularly by removing those apprehensions of personal danger, which debarred all progress to true philosophy in countries, where the Papal domination was established. And surely it forms no mean presumption in favour of the reasonableness of revelation, that the restoration of science and the rectification of religion should be congenial and contemporary; that the beams of knowledge should dispel the damps and darkness of ignorant superstition, but contribute illumination and vigour to the sincere gospel of Jesus Christ. The most distinguished mathematicians and philosophers of our own country, Bacon, Boyle, Newton, Locke, Barrow, and Hartley, have been the firmest believers of the Christian revelation: and not passive educational believers merely, accepting with implicit acquiescence the traditional creeds of their teachers; but strenuous assertors and most able vindicators of the authority,

the importance, and the rationality of the gospel. I would recommend to the notice of Thomas Paine the following passage in the life of Emlyn :* “ Dr. Halley, said Sir Isaac Newton, I am always glad to hear you, “ when you speak about *astronomy*, or other “ parts of mathematics; because that is a subject you have studied, and well understand : “ but you should not talk of christianity, for “ you have not studied it. I have; and know “ you know nothing of the matter.”

Mr. Paine descants with a tolerable share of merriment, in the conclusion of his pamphlet, respecting Jonah and the Whale; which my own stomach also feels an equal indisposition to ingurgitate. It is not unlike a tale, that I lately heard; which many will think not inferior to that before us in symptoms of credibility. A little black-boy, a favorite with the ship's company, as he was carelessly sitting with his bread and cheese, suddenly fell overboard; and was instantly swallowed by an immense shark. Some sailors, witnesses of this catastrophe, exclaimed: “ Cæsar is devoured “ by a shark.” The captain immediately commanded a hook to be baited with a huge piece of beef; which the monster seized at once with the utmost rapacity. He was drawn with difficulty upon deck; his tail cut off to prevent mischief; and the most trembling precaution used in opening his stomach for fear of wounding it's inestimable contents. But how

* See my Evidences, Remark xxxix.

great was their admiration and delight to discover little Cæsar, perched on a tubercle of the purtenance, dispatching his bread and cheese in perfect composure and security !

I have now finished my remarks on this pamphlet of Thomas Paine ; which have been extended thus far, more in deference to the deserved celebrity of the name, than the powers of the disputant : nor am I conscious to myself of eluding any difficulty, or shrinking from the terrors of a single argument, in the course of this examination. To the best of my ability, a concise answer to every objection, not completely puerile, has been specifically given, or is virtually included in this series of observations. Nor, in conclusion, will I dissemble one of my most urgent inducements to this publication to have been, an ambition to declare to my fellow-citizens in the most unreserved manner, that one in the midst of a general obloquy on reformers, as infidels and atheists, is indeed a zealous advocate for christianity ; but, as becomes the disciple of a *lowly* and pacific master, with as warm an enthusiasm for the universal equality and the unalienable rights of man, as ever actuated the breast even of the “ hallowed MILTON.” The more perilous the times, with the more animation will a genuine votary of a crucified Saviour, who “ looks for a better country, that is, a “ heavenly,”* feel himself impelled to a bold and open profession of the practical principles

* Hebrews, xi. 16.

of his religion ; the principles of LOVE and PEACE and LIBERTY, without distinction, to the whole human race. This is the profession of our faith before atheists and unbelievers ; before ministers and kings : from this profession, neither shall shame seduce, nor danger terrify. It shall be our guide through life, our support in death, and, we trust, our recompense for ever !

I implore, finally, the omnipotent controller of events, who “ ruleth in the kingdom “ of men and giveth it to whomsoever he “ will,”* to consider his creature man in this most momentous crisis of our affairs ! to stem that torrent of human blood, which is deluging the earth, at the will of christian kings, beyond all example in the most ferocious ages of heathenism and barbarity ! to confound the devices of all sanguinary destroyers of mankind, combined against liberty and knowledge ; the true “ synagogues of Satan,”† and to turn their hearts ! to annihilate every sentiment of national hostility in every breast ; that the horrid circumstances of war and slaughter may now here exist, but in the bloody page of history, as awful memorials of savage unregenerated man ! to regard the sorrows of the distressed African ; and to compensate with ages of consolation “ the years, in which “ he has seen adversity !”‡ to confirm and comfort the glorious martyrs of truth, humanity, and freedom, whether in bonds or exile ;

* Daniel, iv. 32. † Revelations, ii. 9. ‡ Psalm, xc. 15.

to multiply the number of their followers, that rising generations may call them blessed ! to overpower the delusive flame of infatuated superstition, engendered in the putrid sink of priestcraft, tyranny, and persecution, by the predominant radiance of the Son of Righteousness, the pure and undefiled religion of Jesus Christ ! to consolidate all flesh with the cement of evangelical fraternity * and benevolence ! to harmonize all hearts with the sympathetic influences of “ unity, peace, and concord ! ”

* Matthew, xii. 50. xxiii. 8.

T H E E N D.

FOLLOWING WORKS BY THE AUTHOR,

Are advertised in the London edition of this work, which are here added for the information of those who may be pleased with his sentiments.

1. *Silva Critica*, five in *Auctores sacros profanosque Commentarius Philologus*. Cantabrigiæ, typis et sumptibus Academicis, 1789, boards, 3s. 6d.
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